



SUMMER SNOW is a Second Quarter 2019 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stouppe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here's Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

11 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *******

**United States 2014 color 89 minutes live action feature dramedy
American Family Studios / Bright Light Producers: Dan Atchison, John Howard,
and Justin Tolley**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Jeremy White* and Kendra White***
- 1 Editing: Austin Brooks**
- 1 Cinematography: Kristopher Kimlin**
- Stills Photography: Faith Dawson**
- 1 Lighting: Charlie Harrold**
- 0 Written by: Jeremy and Kendra White**
- Script Supervision: Kara Laufenburger**
- 1 Music: B. J. Davis**

2 **Set Design: Paula Baird**
 Props: Canada Burkhalter
 Wardrobe Supervision: Paula Baird, Rebecca Vaughn
 Makeup: Paula Baird

1 **Sound**
 Sound and Dialogue Editing: Trevor Young
 Sound Mixing: Jacob Falls
 Casting: Beverly Holloway

2 **Acting**

0 **Creativity**

11 total points

**Cast: David Chisum* (Dan Benson, father of Hallie, Julie, and David),
Cameron Goodman (Julie Benson), Garrett Backstrom (David Benson),
Brett Rice (Mr. Jenkins, grumpy neighbor), Rachel Eggleston (j)*
(Hallie Benson), Matthew Alan (Colton, Julie's fiancé),
Shannon Kathleen Baker (Rachel, Julie's pregnant roommate),
John Newberg (Pastor Kevin), Terri Menton
(Susan Benson, deceased mother of Hallie, Julie, and David),
Meeke Addison (Patient with open mouth), Julia-Ann Aguhob
(Isabel's mom), Kathlene Ashcraft (Lady at yard sale), Taylor Boswell
(Audrey, David's wannabe seductress), Sylvia Boykin (Saleswoman 1),
Carla Christina Contreras (Janine, Dr. Benson's secretary-receptionist),
Jeffrey Day (Dr. Buckel), Sarah East (Morgan), Shannon Falo (Saleswoman 2),
Eric Geary* (Police Officer), Bethel Green (j) (Isabel, a Hispanic-American girl),
Clara Harris (Church secretary), Diana Hendrix (Principal Johnson),
Thomas Henninger (Rod), Amy Hess* (Mrs. Tullar, school principal),
Andrew Hunter (Wedding attendee / Teacher), Vinay Huraczy (Schoolmate),
Joshua Loren (Dr. Owens), Gretchen Reinersman (Yard sale customer),
Pete Sears (Mr. Durham), Joy Whitten, Dustin Hutchins, and James Scogin
(Wedding guests)**

What does one make of a family film opening with a meditative mourning scene following the cancer death of a mother? It's too gloomy for preteens,

hardly the freewheeling comedy of errors suggested by dvd cover advertising. Brother and sister co-directors Jeremy and Kendra White apparently feel obliged to saturate their filmmaking debut with explicit Christian messages, short-circuiting any outreach to non-Christian audiences while violating the basic storytelling principle of showing rather than telling.

Whether this was an imposition of their funding studio or self-derived matters little. It creates an uncomfortable linkage of charmingly comic episodes to intensely dramatic themes. That combination torpedoes what might have been wonderfully entertaining comedy. Instead what emerges is well-intentioned dramedy, too bluntly sermonizing.

Second-grader Hallie Bennett is trying to cope with an adult world which often misunderstands her. Like the movie's directing team, she means well but falls short of the goal consistently from misdirected efforts or incomplete comprehension of situations. In fact, the child generally creates chaos or awkwardness instead of solutions. Without accustomed maternal guidance, she's at the mercy of a father whose attempts at substitute mothering fall significantly short of a passing grade.

Older sister Julie gets blindsided by ill-conceived emotional responses to a roommate's planned abortion. Meanwhile, teenage brother David experiments with online websites promising pleasures he's too young to handle. These adult dramas impinge on Hallie's contrasting sentimental plot line as it meanders back and forth between fundraising for a classmate's dental work and defrosting a hostile retired police officer who lives next door.

Heaping one emergency after another on the heads of this already grief-stricken group could have led, in wiser and more experienced hands, to an examination of life's profundities. As in the Biblical book of Job. Here, this mountain of woes only serves as a convenient excuse for trotting out evangelical bromides which fail to adequately address real issues.

Affianced couples shouldn't adopt newborns until they are first comfortable and experienced in novel marital roles. Yes, adoption is preferable to abortion. But only when adoptive parents have learned how to make joint decisions rationally, something clearly not the case with Julie and Colton.

Similarly, a high-school student too immature to obey his father's instructions not to text and drive simultaneously is not going to be a responsible caretaker for someone else's baby. Let's get real.

Consequences of reckless behavior are shrugged off as mere temporary misjudgments, easily rectified by prayer and Bible reading. While such activities are by no means harmful or irrelevant, they are not by themselves antidotes to faulty decision-making or inappropriate bribery. As when Julie tries to push Colton into accepting immediate adoptive fatherhood, threatening cancellation of impending marriage if he refuses to support her resolution. She then dumps a load of guilt on him by proposing the only real grounds for his objection to her rush into motherhood are hypocrisy, callousness, and childish reluctance to surrender his dreams (to hers!).

Has he prayed about the situation? No? Suddenly she accuses him of being a complete stranger to her, solely because he asserts quite reasonably she's not prepared to step into parenting yet. Dad tells her the same thing.

Julie is unwilling to heed any male advice. She would rather channel Mom's guidance from Heaven and become a martyr for her convictions. Whether that might destroy impending nuptials is secondary to her, though there will always be endangered children to adopt. Hillel's aphorisms don't apply to this particular circumstance.

Amid a welter of confusing turbulence involving lifelong consequences, Hallie's more mundane backfires are demoted to secondary status. Predictably, she softens the steely heart of Mr. Jenkins, plants a disastrous you-can-save-the-world notion in Julie's overly receptive head, and eventually gets literally flattened by an angry sibling who then becomes belatedly enlightened about priorities. Pop comes to realize his dictatorship over the children needs some relaxation and accepts limitations of parental guardianship after an accident sends one of his brood into a coma.

Will Hallie meet with success in her quest to get best friend Isabel dental surgery? Can Julie convince Dad and Colton she's right and they are both wrong? Is it possible for David to permanently dump a carnal temptress and learn to drive safely around the neighborhood? Is this story going to conclude with wedding bells? What do you think?

Obviously, there are no surprises lurking in a screenplay which bites off considerably more than it can chew. What makes this dramedy watchable and worthwhile is neither an obtrusive clichéd screenplay nor eye-popping visual effects. No, its prime strength rests in the acting of its unheralded cast.

David Chisum is remarkably poignant as Dan Benson, a beleaguered widower for whom household duties such as food preparation, laundry pickups, homework supervision, and hair styling are simply overwhelming.

Cameron Goodman manages to elicit sympathy for passionately misguided Julie despite an uphill battle against the movie's improbable and manipulative scripting.

As a police patrolman confronting tragically self-centered David, Eric Geary is pitch perfect. Garrett Backstrom's rebellious troubled teen merits accolades, particularly for his display of remorse when confessing to Dan after both have been humbled by unforeseen misfortune.

Offering inspired comic relief in the role of Dr. Benson's receptionist is Carla Christina Contreras.

However, the finest acting performance in SUMMER SNOW comes from seven-year-old Rachel Eggleston, who communicates plenty of emotion without even saying a word. She's totally believable as the crusading youngest Benson child, whose love for dandelion transplants, do-it-yourself baking, and ad hoc garage sales make for a succession of mishaps, each one landing her in the proverbial doghouse with her dad.

Though B. J. Davis's orchestral score is subtle, frequently lovely, and supportively moving, a final "message" song with lackluster melody undercuts what has gone before. Sound recording and sound effects are adequate. Somewhat greater care in enunciation of words by actors would have been welcome.

Home furnishings and school hallways are splendidly messy in colorful clutter, making them convincing doubles of real ones.

Satisfactory cinematography rightly emphasizes performers over locations. Less pleasure derives from outdoor lighting, which seems lacking in clarity and unnecessarily diffuse.

Two special features of this American Family Studios dvd release distributed by Provident Distribution are not detailed in dvd packaging: an amiably conversational audio commentary with numerous behind-the-scenes nuggets of information and a handful of deleted scenes followed by assorted highly amusing bloopers.

Don't be misled by its cover photo: SUMMER SNOW is emphatically unsuitable for preteen children. Instead, it's a worthwhile movie experience for

mature teens and adults, with unexpectedly accurate insights into family dynamics and several bona fide commendable acting turns. Those maintain interest despite an overload of dramatic threads. Hopefully, these young directors will evidence improved skill at generating suspense and editing dialogue in their next outing.