

***Our Very Own* is a 1950 Samuel Goldwyn Films feature release that will enter the Heritage Church Library in August, 2025 on dvd. Kino Ken reviews it below.**

13 of a possible 20 points = *1/2 = a very good film**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

**United States 1950 black-and-white 93 minutes live action feature drama
Samuel Goldwyn Films Producer: Samuel Goldwyn a Zeus dvd release from a
TCM recording**

Points:

- 1 Direction: David Miller**
- 2 Editing: Sherman Todd**
- 1 Cinematography: Lee Garmes**
Stills: John Miehle
- 1 Lighting: Vic Jones**
- 1 Screenplay: F. Hugh Herbert**
Script Supervision / Continuity: Jerry Bryan
- 0 Music: Victor Young**
Arrangements: Sidney Cutner and Leo Shuken
- 2 Art Direction: Richard Day***
Set Decoration: Julia Heron*
Costumer: Mary Wills
Makeup: Robert Stephanoff
- 2 Sound**
Dialogue Direction: Batami Schneider*
Sound Recording: Fred Lau*
- 1 Acting**
- 2 Creativity**
- 13 total points**

Cast: Ann Blyth* (Gail Macaulay), Farley Granger (Chuck), Joan Evans*

(Joan Macaulay), Jane Wyatt (Lois Macaulay, adoptive Mom), Ann Dvorak* (Gert Lynch, Gail's birth mother), Donald Cook (Fred Macaulay, adoptive Dad), Natalie Wood (j)* (Penny Macaulay), Gus Schilling (Frank), Phyllis Kirk (Zaza, Gail's best friend), Jessie Grayson (Violet), Martin Milner (Bert), Kipp Hamilton (Gwendolyn), Ray Teal (Jim Lynch, Gert's husband), Harold Lloyd, Jr., Betty Jeanne Glennie, Marlene Kisker, and Rodger Terry (students), John Considine (j) (boy at birthday party), Arthur Berkeley, John Butler, Allen Matthews, Jim Toney, and Thelma Wunder (poker players)

Our Very Own is a true sleeper film. Released as a Samuel Goldwyn Film rather than a tonier MGM production, it's largely overlooked despite a cast that included Ann Dvorak, Jane Wyatt, Farley Granger, and chatterbox Natalie Wood, then approximately eleven years old. The plot is an unusual one. On her eighteenth birthday, Gail Macaulay decides to tell off her beau-stealing sixteen-year-old sister. Joan retaliates by flinging in the older girl's face a declaration she's not true family, having been adopted into it.

This was shocking news to Gail. Joan's mode of communicating it created resentment and a feeling of betrayal. Why hadn't her adoptive parents, if what Joan claimed was true, told her long ago of the true situation?

Earlier scenes of the film lulled audiences into believing they were about to see a typical family coming-of-age film with scads of humor and perhaps some teen romance prominently on display. In fact, *Our Very Own* will rise to the level of potent drama as Gail finally meets her birth mother under conditions best described as chaotic and most unwelcoming. For Gert is now married to coarse Jim Lynch, living in what is either a very modest duplex or a small rental house.

It's a see-how-the-other-half-lives eye-opener for spoiled and refined Gail, who in a matter of minutes drops from center of attention high school graduating senior to ill-timed nuisance. It appears her birth mother values a servile marriage over a daughter who emerged unplanned. Also fatherless, due to a car accident. Gail had certainly been no bonus baby financially for her mom.

Gert put this socially embarrassing little person behind her in a checkered past kept secret from Jim. Until this rushed meeting, it had also been equally hidden from Gail, too.

Gert had used adoption as a means of obtaining useful ready cash. While simultaneously freeing herself from maternal responsibilities. She still lives within easy driving distance from her only child, but in a culture far removed from that in which Gail has been placed. Not once has she attempted to contact her transferred progeny. Her amazement at hearing from Mrs. Macaulay that the adoptee is on the verge of leaving high school shows she has not been keeping track of the girl's age or achievements.

Out of sight, out of mind, so far as Gert's concerned. Or, as she so crudely put it, Gail "was just one of those things."

The teen has no choice but to accept Gert's brush-off without comment. She's deeply wounded twice in a matter of days, first by Joan's vindictive bombshell announcement, then by the decidedly lukewarm hospitality extended by the woman who had given her life. Seeking what comfort could be gleaned from best and loyal friend Zaza, she's about to bury her grief in stupefying alcohol when older boyfriend Chuck shows up to ferry her home.

He's in moralizing mode, telling Gail she's missed and is throwing away the love of her real parents by chasing after an illusory one who doesn't need or want her.

Besides, someone has to snatch her away from the clutches of sympathetic age-mate Zaza, whose own concept of home consists of a gift Cadillac, lavish wardrobe, and a largely absentee father who doubles as sporty widower. Bouncing from one female companion to another he manages to arrange his schedule to dodge attendance at Zaza's important events. In Chuck's angry opinion, Gail's estrangement from her adoptive family will only be reinforced by the equally disconnected adolescent she's chosen for consolation.

Chuck's already won over Gail's mom and dad, who consider him a proper marital prospect for their elder adolescent, apparently because he's skilled at television antenna installation and has a secure job in a booming business.

As if a possessive, dictatorial boyfriend and a distancing mother wasn't enough of a problem, Gail has to produce an essay extolling American citizenship within the next twenty-four hours or so. The clock is ticking. Can she restore family harmony, humor Chuck, temporarily ditch Zaza, and deliver a heartfelt endorsement of both America and her adoptive family before she leaves familiar hallways in gown and mortarboard?

A fine comic performance from young Natalie Wood, still playing an obnoxiously precocious brat, and a sensitively nuanced dramatic one by Ann Blyth are primary reasons for preserving this film.

Its main topic, seldom broached by Hollywood, gets a judicious yet superficial treatment here.

Suddenly descending upon a parent who's consciously detached herself from an adoptee isn't the best idea in the world, as *Our Very Own* makes quite clear. Feelings expressed by Gail once she learns her home family isn't made up of blood relatives are exactly those which agitate adopted children who know their situation is to some extent an artificial one. Every child who has been moved from one home to another has questions about the degree to which fostering parents really love it. Questions such as those in the paragraph below.

What part of my personality comes from original parents? Who are, or were, those people? Are they living still or dead? Why did they surrender or abandon me? Just how much am I worth to anyone?

Our Very Own doesn't really answer those questions, except to confirm adults who adopt someone *choose* to bring a child into their family. In no such instance is the child "just one of those things" destiny brings to disrupt life.

Sherman Todd's editing is commendable, with slowly paced home scenes in the early part of the film seeming to speed along due to rapid banter and considerable physical movement introducing core family members. Even highly dramatic film climaxes move along swiftly thanks to terse dialogue and cutaways to close-ups. Only beach scenes drag a bit, though a watery clinch involving Blyth and Granger looks like a forerunner of the famous one with Deborah Kerr and Burt Lancaster in 1953's *From Here to Eternity*.

Set furnishings by Julia Heron and overall art direction by Richard Day emphasize starkly the difference between affluence and poverty in late Forties Los Angeles. Those white gloves worn by Ann Blyth and Jane Wyatt represent an upper class style Ann Dvorak's character can only at best dream about. Gert's stuck with merely a radio and record player. While the Macaulay's are first in the neighborhood to purchase that new and expensive entertainment device known as television.

Hugh Herbert's script runs to the conventional, though its witticisms still entertain today.

Lighting seems a bit too soft and unfocussed. This may be the result of age, though.

Sound recording of train whistles and Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" march are expertly recorded.

Thanks to Turner Classic Movies for keeping this film in the public eye. It merits screening and preservation, for the portrayal of American home life just prior to the Korean War is beautifully rendered here. The film has something timely to say about immigration, too.

Since a considerable amount of film time is devoted to the smooching of Chuck and Gail, *Our Very Own* is more appropriate for teens and adults than for children, despite the wonderfully droll behavior and conversations of kid sister Penny.

Check it out.