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—WILL SCHWALBE, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *The End of Your Life Book Club*

Films of Endearment

A Mother, a Son and the
'80s Films That Defined Us



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films of endearment

WATCH CLUB GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which decade of film is your favorite and why? If you were to choose a specific era for your own trip down movie memory lane, which decade would you pick, and which films would you watch?
2. What was the most memorable experience you had during the VHS era watching a movie at home with your family?
3. In your opinion, who was the best leading lady of '80s cinema?
4. Michael and his mother Leslie see '80s cinema as representative of a defining time in their lives and relationship—do you have your own version of such movies? Movies that when you think of them, they bring back a sense of the past?
5. Do you prefer watching movies at home or on the big screen? Why?
6. Has the experience of watching a film together ever helped you understand a person better? Which movie, and why do you think that is?
7. Is there a movie that you return to over and over for comfort, or watch annually?
8. Do you agree that the eighties were the “Decade of the Actress”?
9. How do you think movie-watching will change in the next 10 years? In your opinion, will these be welcome changes?

9 to 5

Jane Fonda was driving home after seeing Lily Tomlin's one-woman show *Appearing Nitely* and the radio began playing Dolly Parton's "Two Doors Down"; this is when the casting for *Nine to Five*'s other two lead roles clicked in Fonda's head, and the rest is cinematic history.

fun fact

Dolly Parton had the entire script of *9 to 5* memorized on her first day of filming. It was her first movie and she didn't know she only needed to know her own lines. She learned hers and everyone else's!



1980

Mommie Dearest

Producer Frank Yablans originally approached Anne Bancroft to play Joan Crawford in *Mommie Dearest*, though he claims that Faye Dunaway wanted it the most, even answering the door in full Crawford makeup and garb when he visited. [Dunaway remembers this differently, claiming she felt all but coerced into taking the role for what became an infamous flop.]

fun fact A continuity editing error in *Mommie Dearest* shows a young Christina Crawford's hair going from long to short to short to long again from one shot to the next as her mother hacks off her hair in a now famous scene.



1981

Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean

Robert Altman originally asked Cher to play the groundbreaking part of Joanne, the trans woman eventually embodied so brilliantly by Karen Black, but the singer—and first-time movie actress—preferred the role of Sissy.

fun fact

If the film feels unmistakably like theater, with heightened artificial sets and clear dramatic entrances and exits, that's because Altman literally shot the film one week after the play ended its short Broadway run—just 52 performances—with the same cast, on two adjacent sets that were mirror images of each other, less than a million dollars on super 16mm film.



1982

Terms of Endearment

Matching their fiery onscreen bond, Shirley MacLaine and Debra Winger had a tempestuous relationship on the set of *Terms of Endearment*. In her autobiography, MacLaine revealed that at one point during a fight between takes, Winger “lifted her skirt slightly, looked over her shoulder, bent over, and farted in my face.”

fun fact

Terms of Endearment is one of the very few Best Picture Oscar winners that one could call a “women’s picture,” and the only one in the history of the awards that centers almost exclusively on the relationship between a mother and a daughter—stories of dads, sons, and godfathers are more the speed of traditionally masculinist Hollywood cinema.



1983

Country

For star-producer Jessica Lange, *Country* was more than just a movie: it was a political cause. Less than a year after its release, alongside other major actresses of the era, Sissy Spacek and Jane Fonda, she tearfully testified before a congressional Democratic task force about the agricultural crisis and the toll it was taking on the livelihood and emotional well-being of the American farm family.

fun fact



1984

The Color Purple

Whoopi Goldberg wrote novelist Alice Walker a letter to tell her she would play any part if they ever made a film version of *The Color Purple*, even though the standup comic and avant-garde theater performer had never been in a movie. She was shocked to hear back from Walker that she had already suggested her for the role to Steven Spielberg.

After reading *The Color Purple* for the first time, Oprah Winfrey, then a morning talk-show host in Chicago, was so intensely moved that she bought every copy from her local bookstore and sent them to loved ones as Christmas cards.

Oprah Winfrey was so driven to be a part of the movie version of *The Color Purple* that she showed up to her audition for the part of Sofia in the dead of winter despite a cold and a sore throat.



1985

Aliens

Despite the film's great success and the iconic status (and Oscar nomination) it gave her, Sigourney Weaver was honest and outspoken about her discomfort with the amount of gun violence in *Aliens*, saying in an interview at the time: "It's hard for me to morally justify being in a film with so many guns."

fun fact



1986

Baby Boom

Baby Boom screenwriter Nancy Meyers was pregnant during the shooting of the film—a comedy about the difficulty of juggling work and motherhood. Weeks before the release, she gave birth to her daughter, Hallie, who has gone on to be a filmmaker in her own right, directing Reese Witherspoon in the movie Home Again exactly thirty years later.

fun fact



1987

Crossing Delancey

Steven Spielberg, married at the time to *Crossing Delancey* star Amy Irving, was integral in getting the film made. He loved the script so much he offered to bring it right to Warner Bros. Director Joan Micklin Silver called him its "fairy godmother."

This was the film debut of 74-year-old Reizl Bozyk, as Amy Irving's "bubbie" [grandmother], after having been a legend of the Yiddish theater in Poland and downtown New York.

Crossing Delancey was a modest box office success in its day, grossing 16 million dollars on a \$4 million budget—not bad for such a culturally specific rom-com. Since then, it's become a huge cult favorite. A 30th anniversary screening at New York's Film Forum, featuring director and stars in attendance, sold out instantly.



1988

The Fabulous Baker Boys

Though it became an iconic moment in film history, Michelle Pfeiffer was initially resistant to performing the scene in which she sings “Makin’ Whoopee” while slinking across the top of a piano, fearing she would look silly and embarrass herself.

fun fact

At the height of her stardom, Michelle Pfeiffer and her business partner and friend Kate Guinzberg cofounded Via Rosa Productions, a company intended to create strong roles for women. Its mantra: “No victims.”



1989