

Film Review: 'Our Idiot Brother'

Terminally-Naïve Hippie Wreaks Havoc in Prodigal Sibling Comedy

Ned (Paul Rudd) is a good-natured organic farmer who was dumb enough to be duped into selling pot to a uniformed police officer (Bob Stephenson). Not long past the opening credits we find him just being paroled, having paid his debt to society by serving a long stretch behind bars.

However, when he hitchhikes home to surprise his girlfriend (Kathryn Hahn) after being released from prison a few months early for good behavior, he's shocked to find out she's already shacking up with another hippie (T.J. Miller). What's worse, she won't even let him stay in the goat barn while he tries to get back on his feet.

So, broke and unemployed, Ned appeals to his mom (Shirley Knight) who enlists the assistance of his relatively-successful sisters, Liz (Emily Mortimer),



MOVIE REVIEW

by Kam Williams

Miranda (Elizabeth Banks) and Natalie (Zoe Deschanel). They grudgingly agree to take turns letting the proverbial black sheep of the family crash on their couches, despite the fact that he has never held a steady job.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for Ned to wear out his welcome at each port-of-call, when the same gullibility which initially makes him so endearing ends up destabilizing his siblings' assorted relationships. For instance, he is forced to bid mother-of-two Liza adieu soon after matter-of-factly mentioning that

he caught her film director husband (Steve Coogan) cavorting naked with his latest leading lady (Lori E. Cunningham).

He next manages to make as much of a mess of commitment-shy Natalie's life by nonchalantly informing her lesbian lover (Rashida Jones) that his sister is now pregnant after having a hetero one-night stand. And that same blasé attitude comes into play when he inadvertently interferes with a platonic friendship of Miranda's as well as with her latest interview assignment for Vanity Fair.

Directed by Jesse Peretz, the decidedly droll *Our Idiot Brother* will work for you to the degree that you are able to suspend disbelief and swallow Ned's terminal naïvete as he unwittingly wreaks havoc everywhere he goes. Credit Paul Rudd for portraying the character with an utterly convincing innocence, even if that dedicated effort is regrettably oft undermined by the script's repeated reliance on repugnant misogynistic and mean-spirited flourishes.

A well-intentioned idealist clueless enough to make Forest Gump look street-wise.

Book Review: Push Has Come to Shove — Getting Our Kids the Education They Deserve (Even If It Means Picking a Fight) by Dr. Steve Perry

By Kam Williams
Special To *The Skanner News*

"I'm often referred to as a 'tough love' principal... The day I declared that I wanted to start a school was the day that the fighting began... Push has definitely come to shove..."

I opened Capital Prep because I know that America has failed to develop a successful public school system that can be replicated across racial and class lines... Children deserve better and we can give it to them...

This book introduces you to the challenges we encountered and how we beat them to become one of America's most successful schools."

— Excerpted from the Introduction

You don't need me to recite the statistics for you. By now, everybody knows that the public school system is failing America's kids. Even those who earn a diploma are generally getting an inferior education in comparison to their private school counterparts and to children in most developed nations, especially places like Finland and South Korea.

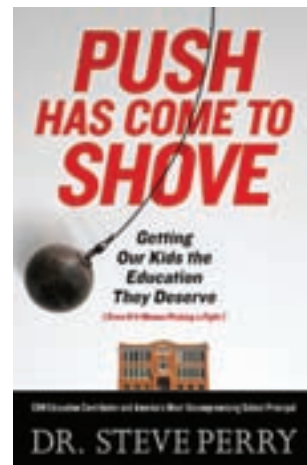
The situation is the most alarming in the inner cities

where the graduate rates are so low that lots of schools are now routinely referred to as dropout factories. This is not the case, however, with Capital Prep, a magnet school located in Hartford, Connecticut.

The institution was founded in 2005 by Dr. Steve Perry, a proponent of tough love reminiscent of the legendary Joe Clark of "Lean on Me" fame. Although he doesn't roam the halls with a baseball bat, Dr. Perry is just as demanding of his pupils, and he also has very high expectations of his teachers as well.

And his tireless efforts have yielded some astounding academic results, namely, a 100 percent graduation rate in a district with a 29 percent average. Furthermore, he sends all of his kids on to college, a rare feat indeed for any public school.

In "Push Has Come to Shove," Perry, a frequent CNN contributor, shares his formula for success in the hope that it might be embraced and replicated all across the nation. But be forewarned, his controversial approach envisions the implementation of significant changes which would amount to a drastic overhaul of the entire school system.



For, with a glee akin to that of former Washington, D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee, Dr. Perry advocates an assault on such seemingly sacred cows as top-heavy administrative bureaucracies, tenure for teachers, and the union inclination to protect its bad apples via what he dubs a "leave no teacher behind" philosophy. Luckily, the author only needs to point to the triumphs of his own program as proof that his innovative ideas deserve some serious consideration.

Brutally honest in its indictment of the status quo, "Push Has Come to Shove" amounts to an urgent clarion call for change by a relentlessly-uncompromising iconoclast who undoubtedly has his students' best interests at heart.

'Our Idiot Brother'
Good (2 stars)
Rated R for nudity, sexuality and pervasive profanity.
Running time: 90 minutes
Studio: The Weinstein Company

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