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POPCORN™

She's All That: Andy Hardy Gets Jiggy With It

By Michael S. Goldberger

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent



2 popcorns
Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the geekiest high school girl of them all?

Though hippie throwback Laney Boggs (Rachael Leigh Cook), the only bohemian residing in tres upscale Pacific Palisades, California, doesn't ask that question in *She's All That*, she'll be the first to tell you it is she.

The nonconformist takes pride in her nerdism. So it's easy to understand why this artistic ragamuffin is extra-suspicious when Zack Siler (Freddie Prinze, Jr.), the wealthy burg's No. 1 chick magnet, comes a courtin' in this typical teenploitation rehash directed by Robert Iscove.

Nonplused by the Adonis's sudden attentions, she asks, "Is this some kind of dork outreach program?"

The self-imposed wallflower is perfectly right in mistrusting the straight-A student and standout athlete. There is an ulterior motive, and Laney's the goat. What we other teenagers know and she doesn't is that Zack has just given the gate by Taylor Vaughn (Jodi Lynn O'Keefe), his vampish female counterpart.

It seems the ultra-obnoxious Miss Popular and prom queen shoe-in is now keeping company with the equally narcissistic Brock Hudson (Matthew Lillard), a humorously clueless would-be actor who regularly appears in a satirical pseudo version of the MTV show, "Real World."

Per the unwritten rule of love which applies only to teen-agers and soap opera characters, for every action that hurts, there must be an opposite and equally hurting reaction. Thus, in an uncharacteristic bit of bravado meant to save face, good guy Zack bets his friend Dean (Paul Walker as the obligatory, blond-haired snake-in-the-grass) that, solely via his popularity, he can turn any girl into a prom queen.

In a plot that doesn't much stand on ceremony, that's just when Laney happens to walk by, frumpish and ruffled as they come — the perfect challenge to Zack's Pygmalion-minded boast. Agreed; she'll be the unwitting sow's ear.

Problem is, in order to foster this Cinderella tale, the age-old stereotype calls for a hopelessly ugly duckling to shed her eyeglasses and then wow us with her suddenly uncommon pulchritude.

But Miss Cook, a cast member on TV's "Dawson Creek," is winsomely appealing right from the get-go, albeit not yet the silk purse she morphs into after a makeover by Zack's world-weary younger sister, played by a very underutilized Anna Paquin (Academy Award winner for *The Piano*).

Once the scenario is in place, *She's All That* runs on automatic pilot, jauntily purveying the required smattering of buzzwords, fashion statements, and ethos-affirming antics. Fact is, the formula for teen-based movies has hardly changed since Hollywood first isolated this group between childhood and adulthood and then invented a genre to entertain them.

Voila, Andy Hardy, perennially con-founded by Polly, forever in search of status, and endlessly tortured by the challenge of living up to his judge-Dad's shining example. Zack is ostensibly Andy Hardy with an earring and a yellow Land Rover.

An unabashedly simple plot telegraphs its twists at every turn. And poor production standards preclude the kind of gloss that might have given the somewhat thoughtful romp a better look and sound. Still, occasional character interactions do make for some humorous situations, and while director Iscove never quite captures the sort of sensitivity his dramatic sequences would like to claim, there's no denying that a modicum of genuine emotion is sporadically achieved. Zack's agonizing inability to pick a college is a credible coming-of-age quandary; likewise, Laney's hermetic existence since her mother's death from cancer can't help but garner our empathy. Otherwise, *She's All That* is basically a re-tread.

But be warned, ye who would negatively criticize this film, especially if you have a teenager living on the premises. You may be trespassing on hallowed ground. Granted, there's something here that doesn't transfer readily to adults, especially fuddy-duddy dads who write film criticism.

It's a teen culture phenomenon which can be likened to the high-pitched dog

whistle that only Fido and Fluffy can hear. Variation on a theme though *She's All That* may be, it's THEIR variation on a theme, their identifying harbinger of youth. Respect must be paid.

Making this motion picture pilgrimage with my 13-year-old daughter, Erin, I naturally want to come across non-judgmental and hip (...or is it hip this go-round?). So I try not to wince when the handful of sexual innuendoes begin flying. Gosh, wasn't it just yesterday we reviewed *The Little Mermaid*?

I furtively glance at Erin to judge her reaction to one scene. Is that lipstick she's wearing? But I count my blessings. No nose ring or rebellious tattoo that says "Vic." At least not yet. But hey, whose rite of passage movie experience is this supposed to be anyway?

Bottom line: how entertaining *She's All That* will depend on your perspective, more or less.

She's All That, rated PG-13, is a Miramax Films release directed by Robert Iscove and stars Freddie Prinze, Jr., Rachael Leigh Cook, and Matthew Lillard. Running time: 87 minutes.

THE word

BY JO & JOHN JACOBSON

BURLESQUE

Prepare yourself for the bare facts on "burlesque," a word with an etymological rating that ranges from "GP" to "X" and beyond, depending on which of its several meanings you elect to infer.

The French borrowed "burlesque" from the Italian word, "burlesco," which in turn was derived from their word, "burla," for "jest, joke or mockery."

One form of "burlesque" is "a vaudeville-like show characterized by wild comedy, dancing, and nudity."

This form of entertainment, which was also known as "burleycue" or "burly," has now almost completely disappeared in the United States. A lesser known legitimate meaning of the word "burlesque" is "a treatment of a serious dramatic or literary work that makes it appear ridiculous."

Finally, "burlesque" can mean "a ludicrous or mocking imitation," a favorite device used by comedians — and "that's a laugh."

GUEST COLUMN

Local School Board Membership: Leaders Needed For New Millennium

Editor's Note: The following is an informative column regarding school board membership from the President of the New Jersey School Boards Association.

By CHARLES V. REILLY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

A recent CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll asked Americans what they believe is the nation's top priority. The number one issue — cited more often than healthcare or Social Security — was education.

It's an exciting time for education in New Jersey. Whether it's a program proposed in Trenton or legislation submitted in Washington, D.C., Garden State residents can expect to see new ideas, new construction, new curriculum — and simply a stronger focus on education.

But, the most critical part of the educational process occurs right in your hometown, during local school board meetings. New Jersey citizens can make a difference by considering membership on their local boards of education.

March 1 is this year's deadline for candidates to file nominating petitions for local school board elections, which will take place on Tuesday, April 20. Statewide, there will be an estimated 1,500 local school board positions on the ballot in these non-partisan elections.

In New Jersey, school board members are not paid. Any local school board member will tell you it's tough work and time consuming — but the rewards can be enormous.

Here are answers to some frequently asked questions about school board membership:

Why me? Why should I serve on a school board?

If you're genuinely interested in education and care about the children of your community, I urge you to seriously consider serving on your local school board. Providing the opportunity for our children to develop the best of their abilities is vital to our economy and to our future as a nation. A school board plays a critical role in a community's efforts to provide its children with that opportunity.

What does a school board do?
The local board of education sets policies under which the school district operates. These policies guide the school administration in managing the educational program. The board also adopts

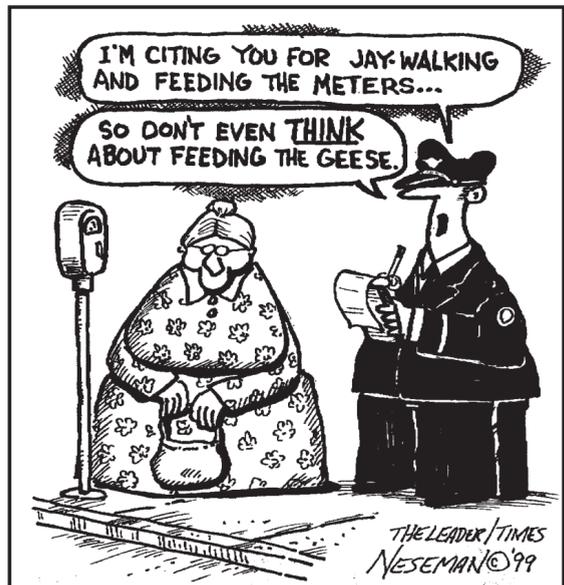
Letters to the Editor

Houligan's Island Praised By Resident

Westfield is a special place to live for so many reasons. This weekend's Washington School Parent-Teacher Organization program was another fine example of families working and playing together. The production from casting to dancing, the band and the chorus — truly a wonderful performance.

I've attended the shows for so many years. Wonderful, thank you.

George Rogers
Scotch Plains



Ticketing of Westfield Jaywalkers Is a Symptom of Other Problems

First there was Operation Desert Storm. Then, there was Operation Desert Shield. Now, cut to 1999 — Operation Jaywalker is underway.

Oh yes, the battle has begun on how to lessen the risks to pedestrians in Westfield following the death of a woman just weeks ago in a crosswalk. With BRAKES (Bikers, Runners and Kids are Entitled to Safety) pushing for enforcement of speeding laws and stopping motorists who move through crosswalks with people still in them, the town leaders have evidently roused the police to ticket everything that moves or crawls.

A warning to geese: the next time you leave a dropping, you too could be fined. Just ask a jaywalker. And you meter feeders, don't think you are off the hook. And if your lawn is not cut, watch out for the Maintenance Code. THEY are coming for you next.

This may seem as though we are poking fun at the ticketing frenzy that is going on in Westfield. But, the bottom line is "Westworld" is developing a reputation of being an unfriendly community. It's never been that way before, and it should not be that way now. In our view, with the direction in which things appear to be headed, and with other plans on the books, matters will get worse.

We believe downtown Westfield should be an enjoyable place to be. A comfortable and safe place for people to linger, to entertain, to shop or to dine. It's not a race to see how high property values, rents, profits and taxes can be driven. It's not a contest to see who gets the most national retailers. Or is it? We believe it's a question of "quality of life" and human decency.

Sure, a jaywalker should be ticketed if he runs across North Avenue as a menace and causes a near traffic collision by motorists trying to avoid him. Absolutely, ticket a motorist that flies through an intersection with a person attempting to get across the street. But don't line up commuters underneath the train station overpass to issue tickets. Don't ticket citizens downtown for crossing streets in a manner that has been the norm for years. It does more to tarnish the image of the town, in our view, than it does in educating the public to the dangers of not using the crosswalk. The same can be said about parents who are now being issued summonses for double parking to pick up their kids from school.

Westfield should not be known for citizens paying

the piper for such petty acts as not using a crosswalk, putting change in the meter over the two-hour limit, or, on occasion, feeding geese at Mindowaskin Park. And the Westfield Police Department should not be unfairly pushed into a corner by reactionary officials. This portrays an untrue and morose image.

An image, we might add, that the Downtown Westfield Corporation (DWC) believes is so important they are buying a full page paid advertisement in an upcoming issue of *New Jersey Monthly*, at a cost of \$2,500, just to promote the town state-wide. In fact, a third of the DWC's 1999 spending plan of \$281,320, nearly \$100,000, is being budgeted just for promotional efforts.

We admit, though, that the police did open our eyes to the jaywalking law. The current statute dates back to 1951. That law states that pedestrians must cross at the walkways. It also states that when a pedestrian is halfway across the street and the light changes, traffic must stop and let the individual proceed.

The basic threat to quality of life in Westfield, as is the situation in many other New Jersey towns, involves too many cars, too much traffic and too many callous drivers. And if there is a downtown parking deck to double the shopper traffic, then what? And if the roads are widened to include traffic signalization at the intersections of Central and Mountain Avenues and East Broad Street, how many more cars will speed through the downtown from the Garden State Parkway in Clark to Route 22? What will be the collateral damage of all this? Are we killing ourselves with friendly fire?

What's lacking in Westfield is an acknowledged vision statement for the downtown; though there seems to be many agendas. This vision statement should come from the town officials, including the Mayor, the Town Council and the Downtown Westfield Corporation. We want you to see this vision statement, and we want you to examine it. Does it make common sense? Does it pass the smell test? Do you care? If so, do all the projects on the books fit?

In the meantime, we believe discretion is the order of the day until the town gets its act together with a vision for the community. If there's a situation that arises requiring action, hand out a flyer explaining the importance of the matter with a request for cooperation. Offer assistance. It costs nothing to be nice.

Letters to the Editor

Ticketing of Jaywalkers Regarded As Punishment From Public Servants

Editor's Note: This letter was also sent to Westfield Mayor Thomas C. Jardim, Chief of Police Anthony Scutti, Third Ward Councilman and Public Safety Committee Chairman Neil Sullivan, and Third Ward Councilman John J. Walsh.

I am shocked, totally flabbergasted and very angry at the steps taken by the local public servants of the Town of Westfield due to the traffic related death of some non-commuter pedestrian recently.

To punish and subject commuters to jaywalking tickets is the most absurd, childish and ineffective policy I have seen in the 11 years I have lived in Westfield!

Jaywalking tickets for commuters is how my public servants react to an unfortunate occurrence? As this ineffective crisis management policy is reflective of your management style, I will be sure to reflect my indignation and dissatisfaction at my next opportunity at the polls.

Several other management decisions you could have suggested might have been:

1) Have the police first give out or post some sign — a warning (other than one time) that tickets will be issued, public safety is finally going to be enforced, etc. How could I have missed those *Star Ledger* and *Westfield Leader* notices? I don't know, but I along with the other ticketed jaywalkers certainly did, and it wasn't because we weren't commuting.

The actual experience getting this ticket was like some surreal scene, almost laughable had it not been so utterly pathetic to see Westfield policemen only "following orders" that are so utterly useless, hypocritical and a waste of everyone's time and money.

2) Post policemen to assist commuters across streets during rush hours as other towns do, i.e., Ridgewood. Police assist jaywalkers every Saturday and Sunday going to temple and church. Why discriminate and punish just commuters?

We are only a larger part of the jaywalking criminals, but no more guilty than the rest of the offenders throughout the town all day long as every one knows. People from the local businesses are permitted to jaywalk just not the train station and the commuters.

3) Better yet, why not finally find a long-term solution to a problem that will increasingly get further out of control commuter parking. This has been perpetually discussed since I've lived here; who will finally take some action and responsibility and do something? More traffic realistic crosswalks that reflect actual pedestrian traffic patterns (no secret: the shortest distance from point A to B. That's the route I along with every other jaywalker needs to take). And enforced automobile traffic speeds through town are possible short-term solutions.

In case you've forgotten, let me remind you why most of us moved to Westfield, it's only three station stops from Newark and it has great public schools; and to be protected from silly jaywalking type ordinances which were also absurdly enforced for a short period of time in New York City as well (to no avail I might add).

Commuters and a solution to commuter parking had better be the priority of any future public servants. Those recent upscale stores are only there now due to the high-income commuters. Nice stores downtown are great, but they would not be there without commuters. These upscale stores could not afford to be in town without commuters.

New residents are moving in even after being told there is a three-year waiting list for a train station parking spot! You guys should be able to figure this out. They are not moving to Westfield because of a new store or two downtown. Again, look at your waiting list, they want commuter parking spots!

Again, you can be sure that my shock and disappointment in my public servants will be reflected in my vote at the next opportunity. I may be reached late evenings at home as I commute home from New York City nightly.

Janis Arnold
Westfield

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Resident Urges Mayor and Council To Preserve, Honor Brightwood Park

The Recreation Commission's proposal, as described in the February 4 issue of *The Westfield Leader*, to develop Noel Taylor Park (previously Brightwood Park) causes great concern.

It is proposed to irreversibly damage our town's last truly natural setting in order to relieve a temporary shortage of playing fields while playing field construction in other town parks is underway. The Recreation Commissioner argues that the town can no longer afford to have a large parcel of land "underutilized." While he may be correct in saying that it is presently underutilized, this need not and should not be so.

Proper utilization of this site need not and should not be playing fields and parking lots.

A former head of the science department at Westfield High School, Noel Taylor, fought valiantly years ago to preserve this land as a refuge for rare and endangered plant and animal species — and as a delight for the townspeople of Westfield.

When Mr. Taylor was alive he was forever guiding and instructing groups of children and young people to experience the joy of this natural setting. He taught them the importance of preserving it.

Many of our townspeople will recall that Mr. Taylor was also the driving force behind creation of Westfield's pioneering ecology center on Lamberts Mill Road.

I don't know whether our schools are today continuing to use this valuable resource as a site for nature study, learning and pure pleasure. I very much hope