

My Left Foot is a movie starring Daniel Day Lewis who portrays visual artist Christy Brown. I had an assignment for a previous class, Art and the Exceptional Learner, where we were to find a memoir written by someone with a disability. Christie Brown was both a writer and an artist from Dublin, Ireland. The movie *My Left Foot* was largely based on the book of the same title.

Brown was born with Cerebral Palsy, making use of his Left Foot his only truly controlled motor skill. For at least the first ten years of his life he could only make guttural noises to communicate, and often dragged himself around with his left foot. The movie portrays Brown very well, in my opinion. I believe having the movie based on the memories of a real person helped with the accuracy of the film, and gave the filmmakers a degree of accountability in the way it was made.

Near the beginning of the movie the adult Brown enters in a flashback of his childhood. In a scene that is very hard to watch, Brown's mother is pregnant and knows she is to go to the hospital soon for delivery. After her other children leave for school she carries Brown over her shoulder up a flight of stairs. When she is done laying him on his bed she makes her way back down the staircase and falls. In a panicked effort to help his mother, Brown flails himself off the bed and uses his left foot to anchor and drag himself across the room and down the stairs. He reaches his unconscious mother and starts kicking the front door to get his neighbors' attention for help. Thankfully this works and his mother is taken by ambulance to the hospital.

Brown is now alone and surrounded by his neighbors on the street. He propped himself against a streetlight and was listening to the neighbors speak about him. Some of the dreadful things they said were, "And there he was, lying at the bottom of the stairs like a moron. God help her. He's a terrible cross to the poor woman. Yes, he has the mind of a three-year-old."

(14:28-14:49).” While the movie portrayal can be assumed to be very accurate, it is hard to watch and listen to such heartless opinions of those who should be more supportive of the Brown family. In the next scene Brown’s own grandmother is reading him a picture book. “A is for apples. B is for butter. C is for carrots. And D is for dunce. You poor, unfortunate gobshite (14:50-15:15).”

In this way I cannot really say that Brown was portrayed as “positive” or “negative,” but as simply “accurate.” People are human. We have attitudes and bad days, but we also have joy and humor at other times. Later in the movie you can see how Brown’s siblings and neighborhood children interact with him as he’s just seen as any other child. They got him a wheelbarrow and enjoyed running him around for a time (17:34). When Brown took the chalk into his left foot and wrote “MOTHER” on the floor for the first time it proved to his dad and whole family that even though he was crippled, he still had his own thoughts and knowledge (27:07). His father was now proud to declare he was a Brown, afterall, when he had not even claimed him as his true son before out of embarrassment.

I believe the depiction of Brown’s disability of having Cerebral Palsy was accurate. According to the CDC website, “Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture. CP is the most common motor disability in childhood. Cerebral means having to do with the brain. Palsy means weakness or problems with using the muscles (2020).” There is a point in the film where Brown gets a doctor, Dr. Eileen Cole, who helps with speech and physical development. It was nice to see how fluent Brown’s speech had become, even during the most awkwardly feeling part of the film when he had confessed his love for Eileen at a dinner party. She told him she’d get married to someone else soon (1:8:14). In a fit of anger he yells in a stammer, “Con-grat-u-lations Peter and Eileen.” The

camera slowly panning around the room to show how everyone is embarrassed. He then says, “I’m glad you taught me how to speak so that I could say that, Eileen (1:09:20)”

In my opinion, I believe that those who have watched this film would come to understand the disability by observing Brown’s treatment by his family members and community through the different stages of his life, as well as the way Brown moved and adapted his mobility. There were definitely a couple of scenes that triggered my emotions resulting in tears, mainly being those that I had mentioned in this paper. After the dinner party scene Brown wrote a suicide letter and tried to slit his wrist. We see that he had resorted to drinking. His mother courageously tells him, “If you’ve given up, I haven’t (1:15:03).” She continues, “You have me heart broken, Christy Brown. Sometimes, I think you are my heart. Look, if I could give you my legs I would gladly take yours (1:16:27).” In watching this film and reading some of the book I find that although those with CP may have some physical issues, they are capable of thinking clearly, and of humor, and of accomplishing amazing things.

Citation

Brown, C. (1998). *My left foot*. London: Vintage.

Center for Disease Control. (2020, September 11). What is Cerebral Palsy? Retrieved November 15, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/cp/facts.html>

Sheridan, J. (Director), & Connaughton, S., & Sheridan, J. (Writers). (1989). *My left foot--the story of Christy Brown* [Motion picture]. Great Britain: Palace Pictures.