

Ten Movies About Alzheimer's Disease You Shouldn't Miss

The 2008 Oscar nominations include two Best Actress nods for performances in movies that deal with Alzheimer's disease. Here are ten movies you shouldn't miss that handle the difficult subject of Alzheimer's with grace, dignity, and realism.

1. Away From Her (2007)

In *Away From Her*, Julie Christie is Oscar-nominated for Best Actress for her portrayal of Fiona, a woman with Alzheimer's who voluntarily enters a long-term care facility to avoid being a burden on Grant, her husband of 50 years. After a 30-day separation (recommended by the facility), Grant visits Fiona and finds that her memory of him has deteriorated and that she's developed a close friendship with another man in the facility. Grant must draw upon the pure love and respect he has for Fiona to choose what will ensure his wife's happiness in the face of the disease. Christie has already won a Golden Globe Award for Best Actress in a Motion Picture (Drama) for her performance in this movie.

2. The Savages (2007)

Laura Linney and Philip Seymour Hoffman play siblings in this tragic comedy about adult children caring for a parent with dementia. Laura Linney is Oscar-nominated for Best Actress, and Tamara Jenkins is Oscar-nominated for best original screenplay. A rare combination of humility, dignity, and humor, Philip Seymour Hoffman was Golden Globe-nominated for Best Actor in a Motion Picture (Musical or Comedy) for his performance as the neurotic professor who begrudgingly unites with his sister for the sake of their father.

3. Aurora Borealis (2006)

Donald Sutherland and Louise Fletcher steal the show in this movie about relationships and difficult choices. Sutherland plays a grandfather with dementia who requires more care than his wife (Fletcher) can handle. They enlist the help of a home health aide (Juliette Lewis) and their grandson (Joshua Jackson), who forge a friendship as Sutherland's character -- who insists he can see the Northern Lights from his window -- becomes increasingly impaired. It was considered a well-crafted independent film that was released under the radar.

4. Sundowning (2005)

Sundowning follows the rivalries and bonding of three generations of lobstermen on Little Stone Island, Maine. When the grandfather and patriarch, Tobey (Minor Rootes) develops dementia, his son and grandson must learn to care for him while maintaining their livelihood. As they both fall for the female neighbor who cares for Tobey, they must let go of their deep-rooted rivalries and accept that her closeness with Tobey is actually a blessing. This little-known movie has received excellent customer reviews.

5. The Notebook (2004)

Based on Nicholas Sparks' best-selling novel of the same name, *The Notebook* features James Garner as Noah, the loving husband of Allie (Gena Rowlands), who is in a nursing home due to Alzheimer's disease. He attempts to rekindle her memories of their long history by reading to her from his notebook. Ryan Gosling and Rachel McAdams play the couple in their younger years. Described as a true romance, the movie was directed by Nick Cassavetes, son of Gena Rowlands.

6. A Song For Martin (2001)

Sven Wollter and Viveka Seldahl -- married in real life -- play married couple Martin and Barbara in this Swedish movie with English subtitles. Martin is a conductor and composer; Barbara, a violinist. They meet and marry in middle-age, but soon after, they find out that Martin has Alzheimer's disease. This moving story is considered one of the most realistic depictions of caregiving on film.

7. Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch (2001)

Based on the book *Elegy for Iris* by John Bayley, this movie tells the true story of English novelist Iris Murdoch's descent into Alzheimer's disease and the unconditional love of Bayley, her partner of 40 years. Jim Broadbent won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of Bayley in his later years; Judi Dench and Kate Winslet received both Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations for Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress, respectively, for their portrayal of Murdoch in her older and younger years.

8. Firefly Dreams (2001)

This Japanese film with English subtitles won several international film festival awards. It tells the story of Naomi (Maho), a troubled teenager sent to the country for the summer to work for her aunt and uncle. She's asked to care for an aging neighbor with Alzheimer's disease; Naomi is initially unhappy about the arrangement, but soon connects with the woman in a transformative way.

9. Age Old Friends (1989)

Hume Cronyn achieves another great performance as John Cooper, who chose to live in a retirement home instead of live with his daughter (played by real-life daughter Tandy Cronyn) as a symbol of maintaining his independence. He befriends Michael (Vincent Gardenia), who starts showing signs of dementia. When John's daughter extends her offer to live with her again, he must decide between leaving the rigid structure of the retirement home and staying to help his friend cope with his disease.

10. I Never Sang For My Father (1970)

This intense story about family conflict stars Gene Hackman as a New York professor planning on starting anew by marrying his girlfriend and moving to California. When his mother dies and his father develops dementia, he must choose between living the life he's dreamed about or abandoning his plans to care for his father. This moving film was based on the Robert Anderson play.

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