



## Beau/Derek on Holiday Picks from Beau/Derek

Everyone has their favorite holiday movie. Some choose the traditional classics, such as *It's a Wonderful Life*, but my holiday favorite is *Home Alone*.

We watch it every holiday season and it still fits the festive bill, seeing eight-year-old Kevin (Macaulay Culkin) throwing a temper tantrum on the eve of a holiday family vacation trip to Europe. Exiled to his room, Kevin wishes that his family would disappear. He awakens to learn his wish came true finding himself home alone. Kevin quickly learns to defend himself across two bumbling burglars. The ending is heartwarming and touching! I give it three out of four gingerbread cookies! — **Derek Zemrak**

My favorite Christmas Holiday film is *It's a Wonderful Life*. Like *Home Alone*, it has the elements of "feel good" movie. In addition, it is a fable that has a moral luster which director Frank Capra effectively captures through the film's protagonist, George Bailey, played by James Stewart.

Undoubtedly, *It's a Wonderful Life* imparts the wisdom that all of us could make an immeasurable difference in this world regardless of fame, money and power. Hence, one of the best sanguine lines in the cinematic history is borne: "What would this world be like if I had never been born?" On a personal note, this wisdom serves as my catharsis on a day-to-day basis.

I highly recommend this movie. Not only does it strike a sentimental chord in all of us, but it leaves us begging the crux of the question of our own existence. I give it four out of four gingerbread cookies for a holiday movie favorite. — **Beau Behan**

*(Derek Zemrak is a filmmaker and the president of the California Independent Film Festival Association (CAIFFA); Beau Behan is a member of the CAIFFA Board and director of the Lamorinda Theatres.)*





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### Family Focus

## Abusive Teen Relationships

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

Maya was sixteen and in love for the first time. Her boyfriend, Graham, was a senior with a funny, charming personality. They agreed to be together exclusively and Maya became sexually active for the first time with Graham. The only problem was that as time went on, Graham began to belittle Maya. He would tell her that one of her best friends was really hot or that Maya could lose a few pounds. At times he would take a long time to text her back or would show up late if they had plans. Since Graham was popular and well-liked, Maya took everything he said to heart and made allowances for his behavior. She had never had a boyfriend before and thought that maybe she was being too demanding at times.

During Spring break Maya took a trip with her family. One of her friends told her that she saw Graham at a party being affectionate with another girl. When Maya confronted Graham, he denied being more than friends with the other girl. Soon afterwards, Maya heard through the grapevine that Graham had been sexually intimate with yet another girl. Although she was broken-hearted, Maya was determined to make their relationship work. She was so consumed with Graham that she couldn't imagine not being with him.

Graham continued to disparage Maya by calling her controlling, insecure, and jealous, and often found

fault with her. But at times he reverted back to his charming self, and then all was well.

I first got involved when Maya's mother contacted me. She was worried that Maya was unhappy much of the time and was yelling and argumentative at home. Maya wouldn't come in for therapy by herself, but she was willing to come in with her mother to work on their relationship.

After several family sessions Maya agreed to see me alone. She disclosed the nature of her relationship with Graham and how it affected her. She felt off-balance and unable to be her former confident, fun-loving self. Maya realized she was taking out her unhappiness on her family, the only ones who loved her unconditionally.

Over time, Maya was able to reflect on her relationship with Graham more rationally and less emotionally. Maya needed to consider what qualities she liked and admired in herself and how to maintain them. She also needed to think about ways that she wanted to improve herself. Then she could look at her relationship with Graham to see how it worked for her. Obviously there were benefits, but were they worth the sacrifices to her self-esteem? And did she recognize the ways that Graham undermined her self-confidence? Could she see the discrepancies between how she wanted to be treated by a boyfriend and how she really was being treated? One question I like to ask is, "If your best friend complained to you about her boyfriend exhibiting these same words and actions, what would you want for her and how would you advise her?"

An emotionally abusive relationship contains insults, betrayals, inconsistencies, manipulation, attempts to control, disrespect and disregard. It causes a person to doubt oneself frequently, be fearful of another's reaction, ignore one's own needs in a constant effort to please another person, and to feel disparaged and degraded.

A physically abusive relationship

usually contains all of the above in addition to unwanted physical contact. This contact may involve shoving or grabbing and isn't necessarily physically painful, but it still crosses a personal barrier of being touched without permission. And when we say "no" or "stop" and are ignored, the other person is violating our basic freedom to control our own bodies.

If you see your child exhibiting signs of emotional or physical abuse, it is important to mention your concerns immediately. Give examples of symptoms and how you see your child's demeanor changing. Ask if she or he wants to talk to you or anyone else about it.

Typically, a victim of abuse is both embarrassed and in denial. It may take your insisting on some family therapy sessions, as Maya's mother did, to get your child the necessary help. Occasionally, families need to plan an intervention with family members and close friends of the victim to confront her with their concerns, observations, and strong requests that she obtain help. The good news is that after a teen is able to recognize and get treatment for an abusive relationship, he or she will usually come out much stronger and better equipped to evaluate future relationships.



**Margie Ryerson, MFT**, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or [margierye@yahoo.com](mailto:margierye@yahoo.com). Her new book, *Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship* is available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and at Orinda Books.

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## Winter Nights and High Holidays at Temple Isaiah

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The Winter Nights rotating family shelter is a project of the Council's social justice alliance. Rabbi Shanks explains that helping the homeless helps fulfill the Jewish tenant of Tikkun Olam, which is the Hebrew phrase for healing the world one broken

piece at a time.

Calahan-Klein says working with the Winter Nights program allows volunteers and clients alike to experience being "in a sacred space." She says "we forget how simple and essential this [food and shelter] is."

## Homelessness Prevention at Shelter, Inc.

After Winter Nights, what next? The answer might be Shelter, Inc. a homelessness prevention program, which aims to support and empower its clients. "It is a hand up, not a hand out," explains Executive Director and Lafayette resident Tim O'Keefe. Shelter, Inc. collaborates with Winter Nights and their clients first by offering transitional housing - normally apartments where the displaced pay a portion of their income toward rent—and then moving families into affordable permanent housing. The program teaches people to navigate the network of social services and requires each family to develop their own, individualized plan. O'Keefe says it is cost-effective: "Servicing homeless families [costs] \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year, [whereas] homelessness prevention [costs] an average of under \$1,100 per household."

Only a very few Shelter Inc. inquiries originate in Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda, but O'Keefe says "the community has very generously supported Shelter, Inc.'s programs for more than 25 years," and "most of our financial support, in-kind donations and volunteer commitments are from the Lamorinda area." Nevertheless, O'Keefe warns, "homelessness is in our community." To learn about Shelter, Inc. go online to <http://shelterincofccc.org.presencehost.net/>.  
**C.Dausman**