

EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES

***A CBS Films Presentation. A Double Feature Films Production
A Tom Vaughan Film***

Film reviewed by Franco P. Visser

Inspired by a true story, the film *Extraordinary Measures* tells the story of a father's determination to do everything in his power to save his daughter's life. Brendan Fraser plays the part of John Cowley, a father of two children, both diagnosed with Pompe Disease. John and his wife Aileen (played by Keri Russell) embark on a campaign to raise awareness and funding for much needed research into a possible cure for their children's disease.

Enter Professor Robert Stonehill (played by Harrison Ford), a medical researcher with a very difficult personality, but with the necessary skills, knowledge and a possible cure for Pompe Disease. Robert's theory on enzyme treatment for Pompe sufferers is ground-breaking, but early on in the film it remains a theory, with no clear evidence-based research to back him up. John leaves his job in advertising in order to focus on obtaining the necessary funding for Robert's research to proceed to a trial treatment phase. The family's life changes dramatically, and together with the assistance of venture-capitalists the journey towards further research and the cure begins. John and Robert join Novazyme, a company working on enzyme replacement treatment for Pompe Disease. Robert's way of working and his tendency to abruptness causes many problems and tension in the process.

Pompe Disease (also known as Glycogen Storage Disease Type II or Acid Maltase Deficiency) is a metabolic disorder that damages the muscle and nerve cells in the human body as a result of glycogen build-up and an inability to process glycogen, a form of sugar that the body stores for later use. The disease affects both the heart and nervous system, and it causes progressive muscle and body tissue myopathy. First recognized and described in 1932 by the Dutch pathologist Johan Pompe, the further work of Christian De Duve and Henri Hers established the diagnosis of Pompe Disease and other lysosomal storage diseases. The disease is especially dangerous for infants and young children, and without treatment the mortality rate amongst young sufferers is high.

Viewing the film *Extraordinary Measures* one's heart goes out to the young children who suffer greatly as a result of this dreaded disease. Their lives are taken away due to the progressive weakening. Walking, climbing stairs, even breathing becomes an issue for Megan and Patrick Cowley



(played by Meredith Droeger and Diego Velazquez respectively), two of the three Cowley children with the disease, compared to their elder brother John Jnr. (played by Sam M. Hall) who does not have the disease and functions as a normal young boy. The children's illness cause the family great suffering, but their pain and heartbreak leads to magic, and as the film title indicates, real extraordinary measures. It is the suffering of these children that tugs at the heart strings and shows the viewer how other families struggle with sickness and disease, but more importantly how extraordinarily some families turn suffering and disease into a positive challenge.

The cast as a whole deliver impressive performances, and both Brendan Fraser and Harrison Ford successfully captivate. The children playing the various parts of (ill) family members deliver exceptional performances, and their acting is to be commended. Also of interest is the process of medical research and funding, and the viewer obtains good insight into these aspects of the medical profession.

Extraordinary Measures is an inspirational and moving film that is definitely worth viewing. The film moves the viewer to think : what do we do to assist those who suffer, if anything? Are we ignorantly going through life, turning a blind eye to those in need?

I am rather looking forward to reviewing the next film for you – *Spud*, the film based on the first book in a current series of three by John Van De Ruit. Shot in South Africa the film promises to be a true classic, especially for those of us with a vivid memory of a complex and at times terrifying school careers. The festive season is upon us again, and I would really like to encourage you to take time out and go to the movies, even if you rent a few DVDs at your local movie store, just do it! For a few hours one can escape the complexities of life and experience the magic that films such as *Extraordinary Measures* and countless others provide. Might I recommend that you also consider animated movies – there are so many new and brilliantly done animated films due this festive season, and it takes one to a different level of experience, and dare I say awakens the child that as we know is any everyone of us . I wish you and your loved ones many blessings and peace over this period.