



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 9, 2010

“It’s Kind of a Funny Story” Is Kind of Funny — and Profound

It’s Kind of a Funny Story is by far one of the better films to be produced in recent years. But viewers beware — the film’s melodramatics have a lasting, haunting effect. Yet it has the unique ability to add levity to some heavy, hard-hitting material, making its title a perfect fit.

Based on a novel by American author Ned Vizzini, *It’s Kind of a Story* follows a depressed teenager who considers suicide so often that he elects to check himself into a psychiatric hospital. The story was inspired by Vizzini’s own brief hospitalization for his case of depression in 2004.



Craig (Keir Gilchrist) is a 16-year-old victim of everyday life — plagued by social pressures, academic pressures and familial pressures. As a student of Executive Pre-Professional High School, Craig feels an inability to keep up with the strenuous curriculum. His feelings of inadequacy are exacerbated by a father (Jim Gaffigan) who has high expectations for his son, and his “genius” sister Alissa (Dana DeVestern) to whom Craig feels compared. Likewise, Craig finds himself in love with his best friend’s girlfriend, torn between his loyalty to his friend and his desire to find a partner in his own life.

What’s most interesting about the film, however, is that Craig’s problems are generally fairly average. The writer did not feel compelled to turn this protagonist into an almost unrealistic voodoo doll, tortured by a variety of extreme circumstances. Instead, Craig is simply a teenage boy who cannot cope with reality, an experience that I suspect can easily appeal to many viewers.

Found amongst a variety of mental patients, young and old, however, Craig cannot help but begin to feel like he perhaps does not belong at the mental facility. With patients ranging from schizophrenics to agoraphobics, Craig has difficulty transitioning, at least until he meets Noelle (Emma Roberts).

Though we are not provided with a full explanation of Noelle’s mental difficulties, we learn that she is a “cutter.” Fearing that she may continue the destructive habit outside of the facility, she has been at the hospital for 21 days when Craig arrives. While it is not clear what problems are plaguing the beautiful young Noelle, it seems clear that they are not far from those Craig feels.

Both Craig and Noelle seem to suffer from severe insecurities and a debilitating desire to please others at their own expenses. Their encounter with one another and the interactions that follow are what perhaps will save them from themselves.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the other patients at the psychiatric hospital. For example, Craig strives with great difficulty to help his new friend Bobby (Zach Galifianakis), whom he meets at the hospital. By all standards, Bobby appears to be a fully functional, outgoing, kind man. However, something darker seems to reside under the surface, something that explains his estranged relationship from his wife, which unfortunately resonates through his relationship with his eight-year-old daughter.



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The most profoundly heartbreaking scenes in the film are those where Bobby is not at the forefront but in the background, when he is found either speaking in person or on the phone to his wife and daughter. In these scenes, viewers are provided a glimpse into Bobby's world that he otherwise does not wish to share.

Bobby's problems cannot simply be solved by a chance meeting, a heart-breaking realization for Craig and for the audience.

Likewise, the film addresses the outside influences that affect one's mental facilities. For example, one of the patients went over the edge after the passage of the Patriot Act, having grown paranoid that all of her phones were wiretapped by George W. Bush himself. Craig admits that he is plagued with fears of the future, as he is confronted by two wars, impending economic collapse, and alleged environmental catastrophe.

It's Kind of a Funny Story tells a story about depression, and mental illness in general. In recent years, doctors seem to be diagnosing mental illness at an increased rate, to the point where it almost becomes an excuse for behaviors that are otherwise inappropriate. As a result of such exploitation, true clinical depression is not recognized or treated as the debilitating disorder it truly is. This film draws attention to the devastating nature of mental illness and the dramatic and heartbreaking impact it has on individuals and their families.

At the same time, *It's Kind of a Funny Story* manages to provide a small amount of humor to alleviate the otherwise distressing storyline. For example, it's quite humorous when patients at the psychiatric ward poke fun at the "point system" allegedly maintained by the directors of the hospital as a system of rewards for those who follow the rules. The random musings of the token schizophrenic certainly draw chuckles from the audience. But perhaps the funniest moment of all is when the patient Solomon (Daniel London), who supposedly has the hearing of a dog, yells at his fellow patients for allegedly being too loud.

A variety of poignant lessons are made in *It's Kind of a Funny Story*. First, we learn that things are never as bad as they seem. As Craig wallows in self-pity and self-disgust, Bobby tells him, "I don't get you. You're smart, you're cool, you're nice. I would give anything to be you for a day. I would just live as if it meant something." From Bobby's perspective, Craig had all of the ingredients for a happy existence, and that very observation forces Craig to re-evaluate his life.

Because by all appearances Bobby appears to be "normal," another important lesson to be learned is that you never know how another person feels until you've walked in their shoes.

Both Bobby and Craig are reminiscent of Richard Cory, the character of Edwin Arlington Robinson's famous poem, who is envied by all of his neighbors for his success and lifestyle, but plagued by depression, which ultimately lead to Richard Cory going home "one calm summer night ... [to] put a bullet in his head."

The film also dispels the notion that victims of mental illness or those who take medication to treat that mental illness should feel shame. In fact, Craig admits that he was taking Zoloft to help treat his depression but elected to take himself off the drug when he felt better. Of course, reason dictates that he likely felt better as a result of the drug, but he was compelled by his desire to distance himself from his own illness.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of all is that taught by Bobby. Quoting Bob Dylan, Bobby tells Craig, "He who is not busy being born is busy dying."



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And the simplest, but too oft-forgotten message of all: "Just breathe."

He who cannot afford this lesson, raise your hand now.

The acting abilities of those in *It's Kind of a Funny Story* are impeccable. I was shocked to see the same man who woke up from a bad hangover in *The Hangover* transform into a mentally distraught patient haunted by fear, hurt, and anger. Kudos to Zach Galifianakis. Likewise, for Keir Gilchrist's first major film, his performance is impressive as he skillfully depicts a young man at a crossroads.

Surprisingly, *It's Kind of a Funny Story* employs some stunning visuals, particularly when it deals with Craig's artwork. Also, the addition of the musical performance of "Pressure," performed by the patients and nurses at the psychiatric hospital, was a lot of fun for audiences. At the same time, that scene, along with a few others, can be characterized as "trippy," though such an adjective is fitting for this film.

Because of the film's adult themes, it is by no means appropriate for young children. However, it is an absolute must-see for adults searching for a thought-provoking film and strong enough for the heavy heart with which they walk away from the theater.



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