

Movies with Characters with Disabilities

JOE TIMMONS / MARCH 26, 2003

An Affair to Remember — 1957

Disability: paralysis

Summary: A remake of 1939's *Love Affair*. Terry (Deborah Kerr) is on her way to meet the love of her life (Cary Grant) at the top of the Empire State Building when she is hit by a car and paralyzed.

Oscar nominations: Best cinematography, costume design, score, song ("An Affair to Remember")

As Good As It Gets — 1997

Disability: obsessive compulsive disorder

Summary: Melvin Udall (Jack Nicholson) is a cantankerous writer with obsessive compulsive disorder who softens when he meets a single mom waitress (Helen Hunt).

Oscar awards: Best actor (Nicholson), actress (Hunt)

Oscar nominations: Best picture, supporting actor (Greg Kinnear), film editing, score, screenplay

At First Sight — 1999

Disability: blind

Summary: Masseur Virgil (Val Kilmer) has been blind since age 3. He meets New York architect Amy (Mira Sorvino) who convinces him to have radical eye surgery done to restore his sight. Virgil regains his sight and must adjust to being able to see.

A Beautiful Mind — 2001

Disability: schizophrenia

Summary: Russell Crowe plays Nobel Prize-winning mathematician John Forbes Nash, who is diagnosed with schizophrenia. The movie is based on the Nash biography of the same title.

Oscar awards: Best picture, director (Ron Howard), supporting actress (Jennifer Connelly), adapted screenplay.

Oscar nominations: Best actor (Crowe), film editing, makeup, score.

Benny & Joon — 1993

Disability: mental illness

Summary: Benny (Aidan Quinn) cares for his sister Joon (Mary Stuart Masterson), who has a mental illness. He also inherits the care of Sam (Johnny Depp), who has a personality disorder. Sam and Joon fall in love while Benny struggles to decide if he should send Joon to a group home.

The Best Years of Our Lives — 1946

Disability: amputee

Summary: Three veterans must adjust to civilian life after returning home from World War II. Homer Parrish (Harold Russell) lost both hands during the war and has trouble opening himself up to his family and girlfriend.

Oscar awards: Best picture, director (William Wyler), actor (Fredric March), supporting actor (Russell), film editing, music score, screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best sound recording

Blue Sky — 1994

Disability: mental illness

Summary: Carly Marshall (Jessica Lange) is a free-spirited wife of an Army engineer whose mental illness interferes with her husband's career. Oscar awards: Best actress (Lange)

The Bone Collector — 1999

Disability: quadriplegia

Summary: Former homicide detective Lincoln Rhyme (Denzel Washington), who is paralyzed from the neck down, is preparing for assisted suicide when his former colleagues call on him for help with one more case. Lincoln must help rookie Amelia (Angelina Jolie) overcome her fears and work the crime scenes to find the killer.

Born on the Fourth of July — 1989

Disability: spinal cord injury

Summary: Tom Cruise portrays Ron Kovic, who had a spinal cord injury from his tour in Vietnam and later became a political activist.

Oscar awards: Best director (Oliver Stone), film editing

Oscar nominations: Best picture, actor (Cruise), cinematography, score, sound, adapted screenplay

Bubble Boy — 2001

Disability: immune deficiency

Summary: A man who was born without an immune system has lived his life in a plastic bubble. When he finds out the woman he loves is about to be married, he builds a portable bubble suit and takes off after her.

Butterflies Are Free — 1972

Disability: blind

Summary: Edward Albert plays Don Baker, an adult who has been blind since birth. Goldie Hawn stars as his neighbor Jill, helping Don live independently of his clinging mother.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Eileen Heckart)

Oscar nominations: Best cinematography, sound

The Caveman's Valentine — 2001

Disability: schizophrenia

Summary: Romulus Ledbetter (Samuel L. Jackson) is a homeless man with schizophrenia who is also a classically trained pianist. When he finds a boy frozen to death near the cave where he lives, Romulus works through the hallucinations of his fantasy world to try to find the boy's killer.

Charly — 1968

Disability: mental retardation

Summary: Scientists inject Charly (Cliff Robertson) with a drug that takes him from someone with mental retardation to a genius.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Robertson)

Children of a Lesser God — 1986

Disability: Deaf

Summary: Sarah Norman (Marlee Matlin) is a former student at a school for the deaf who resists a new teacher's (William Hurt) efforts to teach her to read lips and use her deaf voice.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Matlin)

Oscar nominations: Best picture, actor (Hurt), supporting actress (Piper Laurie), adapted screenplay

Coming Home — 1978

Disability: spinal cord injury

Summary: A Vietnam veteran (John Voight) who is paralyzed from the war, falls in love with a hospital volunteer (Jane Fonda) whose husband is still in Vietnam fighting.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Voight), actress (Fonda), screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Hal Ashby), supporting actor (Bruce Dern), supporting actress (Penelope Milford), film editing

Daredevil — 2003

Disability: blind

Summary: Matt Murdock (Ben Affleck) becomes blind after being exposed to hazardous waste as a youth.

The accident leaves his other senses with superhuman sharpness. By day, Murdock is a lawyer. By night, he fights injustice as the masked superhero Daredevil.

The Doctor — 1991

Disability: cancer

Summary: Jack McKee (William Hurt) is a successful doctor who discovers he has throat cancer. After undergoing treatment, he realizes the importance of doctors treating patients with respect and dignity.

The Elephant Man — 1980

Disability: proteus syndrome

Summary: Based on the true story of Victorian Englishman John Merrick, who had proteus syndrome, a disfiguring condition. With the help of his doctor Frederick Treves (Anthony Hopkins), Merrick attempts to regain his self-worth.

Oscar nominations: Best actor, art direction-set decoration, costume design, director, film editing, score, picture, adapted screenplay

Forrest Gump — 1994

Disability: developmental disability, spinal cord injury

Summary: Forrest Gump (Tom Hanks), a man with a developmental disability, is on his way to see his lost love and tells his life story to others as he sits at a bus stop. Forrest's commander in Vietnam, Lt. Dan (Gary Sinise), has a spinal cord injury from the war.

Oscar awards: Best picture, director (Robert Zemeckis), actor (Hanks), visual effects, film editing, adapted screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best supporting actor (Sinise), art direction, cinematography, sound effects editing, makeup, score, sound

Four Weddings and a Funeral — 1994

Disability: deaf

Summary: Charles (Hugh Grant) falls in love with Carrie (Andie MacDowell), who he meets up with as he and his friends attend four weddings and one funeral. Charles' brother, David, is deaf.

Oscar nominations: Best picture, screenplay

Frances — 1982

Disability: mental illness

Summary: Jessica Lange portrays Frances Farmer, an actress from the 1930s, who was institutionalized.

Oscar nominations: Best actress (Lange), supporting actress (Kim Stanley)

Frankie Starlight — 1995

Disability: dwarfism

Summary: Author Frank Bois (Corban Walker), who has dwarfism, looks back on his life, including his mother's attempts to get to America during World War II, her affairs, their eventual trip to America and their return to Ireland.

Frida — 2002

Disability: polio, mobility

Summary: Salma Hayek plays Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, who had polio as a child and sustained a back injury during a bus accident. Kahlo's physical disabilities seem to have influenced her art.

Oscar nominations: Best actress (Hayek), art direction, costume design, makeup, score, song

Gattaca — 1997

Disability: congenital heart defect, mobility injury

Summary: This science fiction movie stars Ethan Hawke who plays Vincent Freeman, a character with a congenital heart defect, who wants to experience space travel. Jude Law, playing Jerome Eugene Morrow, an athlete with a paralyzing injury, enables Vincent to progress on his mission.

Oscar nominations: Best art direction-set decoration

Girl, Interrupted — 1999

Disability: mental illness

Summary: Susanna Kaysen (Winona Ryder) recalls her experiences as a young woman who was admitted to a mental hospital in the 1960s.

Oscar awards: Best supporting actress (Angelina Jolie)

The Horse Whisperer — 1998

Disability: amputee

Summary: A young girl (Scarlett Johansson) and her horse are injured in a riding accident and the girl's leg is amputated. The girl's mother (Kristin Scott Thomas) takes her and the horse to a man known for rehabilitating horses.

Oscar nominations: Best song ("A Soft Place To Fall")

I am Sam — 2001

Disability: developmental

Summary: Sam (Sean Penn) must fight for the right to maintain custody of his 7-year-old daughter (Dakota Fanning).

Oscar nominations: Best actor (Penn)

If You Could See What I Hear — 1982

Disability: blind

Summary: Based on a true story. Marc Singer plays Tom Sullivan, a successful, determined singer/piano player experiencing situations in his early adulthood without sight.

Iris — 2001

Disability: Alzheimer's disease

Summary: British author Iris Murdoch (Judi Dench) battles Alzheimer's disease as her husband, John Bayley, (Jim Broadbent) struggles to care for her. Intermittent scenes show the beginning of the couple's long relationship.

Oscar awards: Best supporting actor (Broadbent)

Oscar nominations: Best actress (Dench), supporting actress (Kate Winslet)

It's a Wonderful Life — 1946

Disability: deaf, mobility

Summary: George Bailey (James Stewart) sees finds out how much he means to his friends and family when he gets a glimpse of what the world would have been like had he never been born. George is deaf in one ear and Mr. Potter uses a wheelchair.

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Frank Capra), actor (Stewart), film editing, sound

Johnny Belinda — 1948

Disability: deaf

Summary: Johnny Belinda (Jane Wyman), who cannot hear or speak, is raped and tried for murder in her rural fishing town.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Wyman)

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Jean Negulesco), actor (Lew Ayres), supporting actor (Charles Bickford), supporting actress (Agnes Moorehead), art direction, cinematography, film editing, score, sound, screenplay

Love Affair — 1939

Disability: paralysis

Summary: Terry (Irene Dunne) is on her way to meet the love of her life (Charles Boyer) at the top of the Empire State Building when she is hit by a car and paralyzed. Remade in 1994 with Annette Bening and Warren Beatty.

Oscar nominations: Best picture, actress (Dunne), supporting actress (Maria Ouspenskaya), art direction, song (“Wishing”), original story

Love Story — 1970

Disability: cancer

Summary: Oliver (Ryan O’Neal) and Jennifer (Ali MacGraw) fall in love and marry. They struggle with family issues until she is diagnosed with cancer.

Oscar awards: Best score

Oscar nominations Best picture, director (Arthur Hiller), actor (O’Neal), actress (MacGraw), supporting actor (John Marley), screenplay

Magnificent Obsession — 1954

Disability: blind

Summary: Helen Phillips (Jane Wyman) loses her sight after being hit by a car. The man driving (Rock Hudson) works his way into her life and they fall in love. Oscar nomination: Best actress (Wyman)

Me, Myself and Irene — 2000

Disability: multiple personality

Summary: A state trooper (Jim Carrey) is usually mild mannered and non-confrontational until he’s pushed to far and an alter-ego comes out. Both personalities fall in love with and fight over a fugitive he’s charged with escorting from Rhode Island to New York.

The Men — 1950

Disability: spinal cord injury

Summary: Ken (Marlon Brando) is a veteran adjusting to life with a spinal cord injury. His fiancée (Teresa Wright) still wants to marry him but hopes for cure.

Oscar nominations: Best screenplay

Men of Honor — 2000

Disability: amputee

Summary: Cuba Gooding Jr. portrays Carl Brashear, the Navy's first African American diver who is also an amputee.

Mercury Rising — 1998

Disability: autism

Summary: Simon Lynch (Miko Hughes), a 9-year-old with autism, manages to crack a governmental secret code. FBI agent Art Jeffries (Bruce Willis) strives to keep the boy safe from the code's developer, who is ready to kill, when his code is penetrated.

The Miracle Woman — 1931

Disability: blind

Summary: A man (John Carson) who lost his sight in World War I is inspired by the speeches of evangelist Florence Fallon (Barbara Stanwyck), who preaches salvation and performs phony miracles. The two meet and fall in love.

The Miracle Worker — 1962

Disability: blind, deaf

Summary: Anne Sullivan (Anne Bancroft), who has a vision impairment, tries to teach young Helen Keller (Patty Duke), who is deaf and blind.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Bancroft), supporting actress (Duke)

Oscar nominations: Best director (Arthur Penn), costume design, adapted screenplay

Molly — 1999

Disability: autism

Summary: Molly McKay (Elisabeth Shue) is released from an institution and undergoes an experimental medical treatment that turns her into a genius.

Moonstruck — 1987

Disability: amputee

Summary: Johnny (Danny Aiello) asks fiancée Loretta (Cher) to make amends with his estranged brother, Ronny (Nicholas Cage), while he goes to Italy to tend to his dying mother. Loretta and Ronny fall in love over opera. Ronny lost his hand in an accident and uses an artificial hand.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Cher), supporting actress (Olympia Dukakis), screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Norman Jewison), supporting actor (Vincent Gardenia)

Moulin Rouge! — 2001

Disability: dwarfism, tuberculosis

Summary: The beautiful courtesan Satine (Nicole Kidman), who is dying of tuberculosis, falls in love with struggling writer Christian (Ewan McGregor) as they work to produce a play in bohemian Paris. Artist Henri de Toulouse Lautrec (John Leguizamo), who has dwarfism, is among the bohemian artists involved in the play.

Oscar awards: Art direction, costume design.

Oscar nominations: Best picture, actress (Kidman), cinematography, film editing, makeup, sound.

My Left Foot — 1989

Disability: cerebral palsy

Summary: Christy Brown (Daniel Day Lewis) has control of only one limb, his left foot. He learns to express himself using his left foot and becomes a painter and writer.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Day-Lewis), supporting actress (Brenda Fricker) Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Jim Sheridan), adapted screenplay

My Life — 1993

Disability: cancer

Summary: Bob (Michael Keaton) is diagnosed with cancer and told he has only months to live. His wife, Gail (Nicole Kidman), is pregnant with their first child. Bob begins videotaping his life so that his child will know him after he dies.

'Night Mother — 1986

Disability: epilepsy

Summary: Jessie Cates (Sissy Spacek) tells her mother (Anne Bancroft) one night that she is going to commit suicide by morning. Jessie, who has epilepsy and whose son is a drug addict, says she is “sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest — 1975

Disability: mental illness

Summary: McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) is a swaggering, boastful man who is locked up in a mental institution, where his refusal to docilely play by the rules ends up getting him killed.

Oscar awards: Best picture, director (Milos Forman), actor (Nicholson), actress (Louise Fletcher), adapted screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best supporting actor (Brad Dourif), cinematography, film editing, score

Ordinary People — 1980

Disability: depression

Summary: A family tries to come to terms with its grief after the death of a son. Their younger son (Timothy Hutton) experiences major depression

Oscar awards: Best picture, director (Robert Redford), supporting actor (Hutton), adapted screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best actress (Mary Tyler Moore), supporting actor (Judd Hirsch)

The Other Sister — 1999

Disability: developmental

Summary: When Carla Tate (Juliette Lewis) finishes her training school, she seeks independence. Her wealthy family overlooks her abilities and underestimates her relationship with Danny (Giovanni Ribisi), who also has a developmental disability.

Philadelphia — 1993

Disability: AIDS

Summary: A high-profile lawyer with AIDS (Tom Hanks) hires a personal injury lawyer (Denzel Washington) to help sue his employer for firing him.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Hanks), song (“Streets of Philadelphia”)

Oscar nominations: Best makeup, song (“Philadelphia”), screenplay

The Piano — 1993

Disability: speech impairment

Summary: Ada McGrath (Holly Hunter), who is mute, and her daughter are sent to New Zealand for an arranged marriage. Ada's new husband sells her prized piano, which she uses to express herself.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Hunter), supporting actress (Anna Paquin), screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Jane Campion), cinematography, costume design, film editing

Pride of the Yankees — 1942

Disability: ALS

Summary: Gary Cooper portrays baseball great Lou Gehrig.

Oscar awards: Best film editing

Oscar nominations: Best picture, actor (Cooper), actress (Teresa Wright), art direction, cinematography, special effects, score, sound, original story, screenplay

Pumpkin — 2002

Disability: developmental

Summary: Carolyn (Christina Ricci) is a snobbish college sorority girl who mentors a member of a "challenged athletes" team for a sorority service project. At first she's afraid of Pumpkin (Hank Harris), but soon she finds herself falling in love with him, shocking her friends and the family.

Rain Man — 1988

Disability: autism

Summary: Charlie Babbitt (Tom Cruise) finds out after his father dies that he has a brother, Raymond (Dustin Hoffman), who has been institutionalized throughout his life because he has autism.

Oscar awards: Best picture, director (Barry Levinson), actor (Hoffman), screenplay

Oscar nominations: Best art direction, cinematography, film editing, score

Rear Window — 1954

Disability: mobility

Summary: When Scotty (James Stewart) is laid up with a broken leg he amuses himself by spying on his neighbors through binoculars. Then he and his girlfriend (Grace Kelly) begin to suspect one of those neighbors of murder.

Oscar nominations: Best director (Alfred Hitchcock), cinematography, sound recording, screenplay

Regarding Henry — 1991

Disability: closed head injury

Summary: Lawyer Henry Turner (Harrison Ford) gets caught in the middle of a convenience store robbery and is shot, leaving him with a closed head injury. Henry does not remember former colleagues and must relearn even simple tasks such as tying his shoes.

The Replacements — 2000

Disability: deaf

Summary: When the professional football players go on strike, the league brings in substitute players, a rag-tag team who must learn to work together. One of the players is deaf.

Return to Me — 2000

Disability: heart transplant

Summary: Grace (Minnie Driver) receives a heart transplant that saves her life. She later discovers the donor was the wife of her new boyfriend, Bob (David Duchovny).

Scent of a Woman — 1992

Disability: blind

Summary: A retired Army lieutenant who is blind (Al Pacino) decides to spend Thanksgiving in New York City with the young man (Chris O'Donnell) who is hired as his care attendant.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Pacino)

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Martin Brest), adapted screenplay

Shine — 1996

Disability: mental illness

Summary: David Helfgott (Geoffrey Rush) is an Australian pianist who is mentally abused by his father and later institutionalized.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Rush)

Oscar nominations: Best picture, director (Scott Hicks), supporting actor (Armin Mueller-Stahl), film editing, score, screenplay

Steel Magnolias — 1989

Disability: diabetes

Summary: A young woman (Julia Roberts) gets married and has a child while her mother (Sally Field) and friends offer each other emotional support.

Oscar nominations: Best supporting actress (Roberts)

Suspect — 1987

Disability: deaf

Summary: Carl Wayne Anderson (Liam Neeson) is a homeless man who is deaf and does not speak.

When he's arrested for the murder of a judge's secretary, public defender Kathleen Riley (Cher) sets out to find the real killer and finds corruption at high levels.

Swing Kids — 1993

Disability: mobility

Summary: A group of teens in Nazi Germany are part of a counter culture that listens to swing music.

When two of the boys are enlisted in Hitler's youth army, one begins fall under the spell of the brainwashing. Another of the boys walks using a crutch.

There's Something About Mary — 1998

Disability: developmental disability

Summary: A former geek (Ben Stiller) realizes he's still in love with his high school crush, Mary

(Cameron Diaz). He hires a private detective (Matt Dillon) to track her down, and both men compete for Mary's affections. Mary's brother, Warren, has a developmental disability.

The Three Faces of Eve — 1958

Disability: multiple personalities

Summary: A timid housewife (Joanne Woodward) discovers she is leading the lives of two people — timid wife and mother Eve White and brash partier Eve Black. Later, a third personality emerges.

Oscar awards: Best actress (Woodward)

The Tic Code — 1998

Disability: Tourette syndrome

Summary: A 10-year-old who wants to be a jazz pianist gets a job in a nightclub, where he meets a saxophone player, Tyrone (Gregory Hines). Both the boy, Miles, and Tyrone have Tourette syndrome. While the Tyrone has worked to cover his disability, Miles and his mother are accepting of.

Training Day — 2001

Disability: spinal cord injury

Summary: A corrupt cop (Denzel Washington) takes a rookie (Ethan Hawke) under his wing. In one scene, they solicit information from a drug dealer (Snoop Dogg) who is paralyzed.

Oscar awards: Best actor (Washington)

Oscar nominations: Best supporting actor (Hawke)

Unbreakable — 2000

Disability: osteogenesis imperfecta

Summary: When David Dunn (Bruce Willis) survives a major train wreck without a scratch, Elijah Price (Samuel L. Jackson) takes notice. Elijah, who has osteogenesis imperfecta, thinks he has found a person who is at the opposite end of his condition — someone who is never sick or injured.

The Violent Men — 1955

Disability: paralysis

Summary: Lew Wilkison (Edward G. Robinson) owns the Anchor Ranch, the biggest cattle ranch in his Western town. He wants neighbor John Parrish (Glenn Ford) to sell but Parrish is suspicious of Wilkison's devious tactics. Wilkison is paralyzed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair.

Wait Until Dark — 1967

Disability: blind

Summary: A doll containing smuggled drugs ends up in Suzy Hendrix's home. When the men who want the drugs back begin to terrorize her, Suzy, who is blind, must figure out who to trust.

Oscar nominations: Best actress (Hepburn)

The Waterdance — 1992

Disability: spinal cord injury

Summary: Author Joel Garcia (Eric Stoltz) breaks his neck while mountain climbing. In rehab, he meets two other men who are also coming to terms with their new disability.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape — 1993

Disability: autism

Summary: Gilbert (Johnny Depp) must care for his brother (Leonardo DiCaprio), who has autism, and his mother who is obese. Oscar nominations: Best supporting actor (DiCaprio)

Wild, Wild West — 1999

Disability: amputee

Summary: In the Old West days, gunslinger Jim West (Will Smith) must team up with inventor Artemus Gordon (Kevin Kline) to thwart the plans of villain Arliss Loveless (Kenneth Branagh), who wants to assassinate President Grant. Loveless is a double amputee and uses a wheelchair.

X-Men — 2000

Disability: spinal cord injury

Summary: Professor X runs an academy for “mutants” — people with superhero powers. The X-Men team must defend themselves against anti-mutant legislation and the villainous mutants. Professor X (Patrick Stewart) uses a wheelchair.