

“It’s NOT about aliens!” - A synopsis of M. Night Shyamalan’s Film: *Signs* by Jan Fallon

“It’s NOT about aliens!” This is my adamant response to the film, *Signs* by M. Night Shyamalan. In fact, in each of Shyamalan’s films, *Signs*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Unbreakable*, *The Village*, I have learned to pay attention to the underlying meanings, the personal, intimate reflections of being human. Even though these films include that “unhuman” ingredient that gives us chills and that shrinking feeling before an upcoming scene, I believe that each film speaks to the inner lives of men: Who are we, what motivates us and what will we do once we know?

In *Signs*, the Hess family is relentlessly harassed by the worst type of alien - it strikes all of the imagery of what is believed about ETs, even down to the big, blackened, angled-upward eyes - yet, they are unknown, unnumbered and HUGE!

Father Graham, father of the Hess family, and former town minister struggles to keep his family alive physically, while his own faith has died. He is having a really bad time in his life. Not only are aliens invading his quiet farm and rural community - he recently lost his wife, Colleen, to an odd, “It must have been God’s plan” auto accident. She speaks to Graham one last time and tells him the key to overcoming the odds, “Tell Merrill to ‘swing away.’”

Merrill is the live-in brother-in-law, a defunct town baseball star who comes to help with the kids and farm after the loss of Colleen. Just like Graham, Merrill’s loss in life - never making it to the big leagues - is a redemptive piece of this scary movie.

We never go it alone in life. Often it is our family that helps us through. In this regard, Graham’s two children, Morgan, an asthma sufferer, and Bo, a water-drinking enthusiast, each lend a hand toward the redemption of their loss and life.

Morgan suffers an extreme asthma attack while in the cellar of their home in their last attempt to escape the aliens. It is during this scene that Father Graham rekindles his faith. It is as if he lives the words that Peter said to Christ, “Where can I go, who else has the words of life?” As he cradles his son with his words, “Breathe, Morgan. Breathe,” Graham takes his first deep relinquishing breath since the loss of his wife.

Once the chaos above their heads dies down, all four emerge from the cellar. On TV they see a report that the aliens are retreating, but they also see the reflection of one lingering foe.

In one chaotic, climactic scene, Merrill grabs his baseball bat, hold up on the wall for posterity, to “swing away” at the intruder. Bo stands in the background like the smallest of damsels in distress - but her water glasses, all half-filled, litter the living room. Morgan, having another asthma attack, is grabbed by the alien as hostage, and sprayed with a mist to secure his captivity. Merrill swings away, the half-filled glasses pellet the air, leaving the water-susceptible alien decimated. Graham sweeps Morgan up and outside and discovers that his son’s asthma-closed lungs actually saved his life.

We all breathe a lot easier after the aliens leave town. But it is the breath of new life that redeems Graham and his grief-stricken family from the grasp of sorrow and disbelief. And through this film we are invited to discover who are we, what motivates us and what will we do once we know?

My teenage son will argue the point with me, but I still say, “It’s NOT about aliens!”

If you haven’t seen *Signs*, you have to. Then follow with any M. Night Shyamalan film yet on your list. I’m looking forward to *The Lady in the Water* due out this May. After all, I have to find out what it is **really** about.