

“Swimming Upstream” starring Geoffrey Rush, Judy Davis, Jesse Spencer, Tim Draxl, 2003, PG-13, 114 minutes

Major themes:

- Father / son relationships
- Competitive sports
- Fairness
- Domestic abuse
- Manipulation
- Despair
- Triumph

Major characters:

- Harold & Dora Fingleton
- Tony Fingleton
- John Fingleton
- Harold Fingleton, Jr.
- Ronald Fingleton
- Diane Fingleton

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- This movie is based on an autobiography by Tony Fingleton, and was written by both Tony and his sister Diane Fingleton. It is set in the 1950s in Brisbane, Queensland.
- The character of Dawn Fraser's coach is a cameo role by the real Dawn Fraser, who is one of Australia's best known athletes, who won 8 Olympic medals (including 4 gold medals) and 6 Commonwealth Games gold medals from 1956 to 1964. She was the first of only two swimmers in Olympic history to win individual gold medals for the same event at three successive Olympics. She held 39 records, including the 100 meters freestyle record, which stood for 15 years.
- In the movie, Tony competed in the 100-meter backstroke, winning a silver medal at the 1962 British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Perth, Western Australia. In reality, the swimming events at those games were measured in yards – Tony won a silver medal in the 220 yard backstroke. When he was later told that "*your event was today*" on October 13th, 1964, the reference was to the 200 meter backstroke event at the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo (there was no 100 meter backstroke event at those Games).
- Diane Fingleton became the first ever female Queensland Chief Magistrate. She attracted criticism for holding reconciliation ceremonies in Magistrates Courts in Queensland and issuing a formal apology to indigenous peoples. In a later situation, she was convicted of the offence of intimidation of a witness, which upon appeal to the High Court of Australia was quashed, but not until she had served 7 months in prison.
- When John Fingleton saw this movie, it was the catalyst for him to uncover the story no one had told, of what made his father the man he was, resulting in the book, "*Surviving Maggie*." Harold was both neglected and abused by his alcoholic mother Maggie and was forcibly removed to a state orphanage at age 11.

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Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 1:27 (NLT) – *“God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.”*

Romans 8:27 – 28 (The Message) – *“If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.”*

Galatians 6:7 (NLT) – *“Don't be misled--you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.”*

Acts 10:34 – 36 (The Message) – *“Peter fairly exploded with his good news: ‘It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel—that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again—well, he's doing it everywhere, among everyone.’”*

Luke 17:1 – 2 (NLT) – *“One day Jesus said to his disciples, ‘There will always be temptations to sin, but what sorrow awaits the person who does the tempting! It would be better to be thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around your neck than to cause one of these little ones to fall into sin.’”*

2 Corinthians 4:8 – 9 (NLT) – *“We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.”*

2 Corinthians 2:14 (NIV) – *“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”*

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Discussion points:

1. Tony connected his inability to please his father with his falling "*between the cracks.*" Discuss.
2. "*Hurt people hurt people*" – how is this evident in Harold's life and actions? What can break the cycle of abuse?
3. Although the human spirit can endure a lot of pain and yet triumph in some ways, there is a high price to pay for holding onto unforgiveness. Discuss.
4. Dora stayed in an abusive situation. What were the consequences for her? for the children?
5. What does it mean to be successful?
6. One form of manipulation is "*playing*" people against each other, perhaps as a way to get attention. What are some of the ways we can recognize and respond to this kind of behavior?
7. Man is capable of both great good and great evil. How do the ways we choose to respond to adverse circumstances affect us?
8. Discuss Tony's remark, "*Someone once told me that if you're nobody without a medal, you're still nobody with one.*"