

## Lasting images of 'Bella'

The critically acclaimed film, "Bella," released Oct. 26 in 31 markets nationwide, had a solid opening weekend, garnering the second-highest per theater average with \$8,051 in ticket sales at the 165 theaters, where it played.

A normal release for opening weekend would be 2,000-3,000 theaters. For instance, "Saw IV," last weekend's top grossing film, opened in 3,183 theaters, with a per theater average of \$9,976. The second top grossing film, "Dan in Real Life," opened in 1,921 theaters but fell far short of both "Bella" and "Saw IV" with a per theater average of only \$6,147.

The sales figures for "Bella" may well prompt its distributor, Roadside Attractions, to move to a wider release in coming weeks. Let's hope it does. (If you call your favorite theater to request "Bella," you can help make this happen.) For "Bella," unlike so many other films devoid of meaning that flit from your mind once you leave the theater, makes a lasting impression.

After seeing "Bella" last weekend, its images, scenes and key dialogue, kept washing over me, making me think and reflect about the film's depth of meaning.

For instance, the blind man,

whom Nina, played by Tammy Blanchard, helps, at the film's outset, to see the world around by describing images, is soul-searing. "Just an ordinary day" she blurts out, until she realizes this man, pressing her to describe the surrounding scenery, is blind; but though

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blind, has extraordinary vision.

Another scene that kept lapping up on the shores of my heart and soul comes near the end. Jose, played by Eduardo Verastagui, and Nina are talking on the beach, at night, after spending the latter part of the day with Jose's family. Nina reveals the emotional contours of her broken family that theater-

goers, with similarly battered and bruised families, will relate with so well.

After shedding her emotional pain, Nina tells Jose in a warmly heartfelt way, "You have a good family." Implicit in her statement is that the world they have revealed to her helps her see a different path vis-a-vis the excruciating decision she faces of whether to go forward with her unplanned pregnancy, the crux of the whole film.

As Nina's words kept echoing in my mind, I came across an article about the recently released letters from Katherine Hepburn's estate, that led off with this letter to New York theatrical producer George C. Tyler that "suggests a young actress that he 'might keep in mind' for a part. 'She has had

a variety of experience,' " it says, and "she comes from a good family." (New York Times, Oct. 30, 2007).

Indeed, like Jose in Bella, Katherine Hepburn had a "good family."

Her mother, also named Kate, a good, well-intentioned woman, could never have foreseen how her crusade to provide birth control to poor women in urban centers would undermine the "culture of life." On the contrary, she believed the family — *good families* — would be the "bulwark" against any resulting promiscuity. And, Margaret Sanger, who led this crusade, promised that birth control "does not mean the interruption of life after conception."

"Bella" in its own quiet way is leading a crusade to rethink

the assumptions that have developed since the Sanger, Hepburn and company's extraordinary success in changing the cultural norms concerning ordinary decisions on which the "good family" hinges.

As Executive Producer Sean Wolfington of One Media Group, has predicted, with the release of "Bella," "America's heart will turn towards more beautiful and meaningful films that inspire our lives." And, I might add, make us think about our ordinary assumptions.

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