

## **Mojo Hand**

Story synopsis of Screenplay by Ted Davis and Doug Hand. Optioned with Joe Morton as Director and James Earl Jones as Jimmy Burns, but never produced.

In a Vermont V.F.W. Hall, JIMMY BURNS, itinerant local country blues musician, plays another one-night gig with his band, the Red Ramblers. At home, CORRINA, his wife of 35 years, looks in a mirror and examines the effects of her illness. On this particular autumn night, they receive two visitors -- one long absent, the other long dead. LONNIE B., their son, now a rock celebrity in New York City, comes home for the first time in 17 years. With him arrives the specter of WILLIE WOODSIDE, Corrina's first husband and Lonnie's father, who was killed in an East Texas juke joint. Thus begins a story of betrayal and loss, redemption and reconciliation.

Jimmy, gentle natured and hard as flint, loves his music and Corrina. Since moving north from Texas with the infant Lonnie in tow and Willie freshly buried, it has been a musician's life of surviving from gig to gig. Now, facing illness and age, that life might not be enough. It is a life that Lonnie scorns. When he returns, he is filled with rage -- rage at Jimmy for being "a shit-kicker," rage that he was never able to know his father. Willie, he thinks, would have been the man Jimmy is not. Willie, he knows, passed on to him his considerable gifts with the guitar. Lonnie begins to investigate his father's life and death, rifling through stacks of old letters, cards and flyers and calling people in East Texas. At the same time, recognizing the family's difficult circumstances and encouraged by Corrina, he invites Jimmy to play in a blues revival concert at New York City's House of Blues. Jimmy reluctantly accepts.

Lonnie imagines it as a test. At first, Jimmy fails miserably. He is out of his element and his performance is hick. Lonnie is, predictably, furious, and smug. At the second concert, though, Jimmy -- accompanied by a street musician he met and jammed with on 8th Avenue -- reverts to the music he knows and brings down the house, while subtly revealing that he is the source of Lonnie's guitar gifts. Having cracked a tough New York audience, Jimmy heads for Corrina and home on his 70th birthday. Lonnie, feeling mocked and betrayed, literally chases him back to Vermont. Outside the entrance to the old and apparently deserted V.F.W. Hall, Corrina confronts Lonnie with the truth about his father -- Jimmy killed Willie, to save Lonnie's life, when Willie, in a drunken rage, went after the infant with a knife. The first truth paralyzes Lonnie, but the second and larger truth, about the value of Jimmy's life as a musician, still waits inside. Corrina leads a stunned Jimmy into a hall, filled with dozens of former Red Ramblers from all through the years, now gathered for the birthday celebration and playing his music. Jimmy joins the current band on the stage, and is followed by Corrina and at last Lonnie as their voices blend in reconciliation and song.

June 30, 2005 -- **Letter to the Editor**

Some Thoughts on Winning:

The sports pages of the local papers regularly celebrate the championship teams in New Rochelle. Winning makes people feel good, about their community and themselves. It might be worth a moment, however, to consider the cost of some of these victories.

For every champion there is a loser, but the quest for victory, particularly in the various travel sports leagues, often produces more “losers” than we acknowledge. Pages of league guidelines make pronouncements about “promoting a child’s self-esteem”, but at game time, we often “play talent,” and to promote a higher level of competition, put aside the other kids. Some folks say, “kids should learn the true nature of competition.” And by the age of ten, the talent judges have banished many of our children to the bench, right field or at least far away from the real competition.

The anointed few receive the extra coaching, encouragement, attention, and approval from the adults (coaches and parents); the rest are left with minimal attention, neglect or even taunting and humiliation, encouraged to retire to the couch of life as a spectator. Imagine your child going to every practice, working hard and suiting up for every game, only to sit on the bench, except perhaps for a couple of minutes or innings of token participation. The “stars” get to go home and celebrate the victory and the benched child gets to go do what? “I guess I stink” is then followed with a withdrawal from all sports. And parents of the star athletes are pleased to lose the deadwood on the team.

We are left with many children for whom all the “benefits” of team sports are no longer a possibility. The whole opportunity to learn about cooperation, shared goals and the rewards of hard work is set aside in favor of winning. If we as a community think “winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing,” then we should accept the results and not try to tell our children that the benefits of sports are for everyone. Our children deserve no less than our honesty. But if we really think that winning is only one thing, one part of sports, maybe we had better reconsider this aristocracy of talent. Or maybe we can even reconsider the whole definition of talent. Do diligence, dedication and perseverance play any part? We had better have answers for the many children left behind to ponder what they can still believe in.

What if we really believed that hard work and individual effort have value? Then we would have to work harder ourselves, supporting and creating many more opportunities for kids to succeed instead of merely win. Create more levels of competition on the travel circuit to balance the need to accommodate different levels of skill development. Some communities have taken a hard look at the “building champions” model and changed their approach to “building more travel soccer” by giving kids appropriate levels of competition (based on their skill level), but guaranteeing greater numbers of opportunities. And there are coaches and parents in our city who also have devoted much effort (in the face of opposition) to create sports that give kids more chances for growth, instead of just dividing the world between the have-talents and the have-nots. In the classroom we know how difficult it is to respect every child’s individual rate of development and provide them with equal opportunity along the way. Do we believe that good teaching or good

coaching is wasted on the child with less obvious talents?

In New Rochelle, for the past 19 years, Coach Walter Brown with his dedicated, skilled staff and the committed parents of the Remington Flyers Track Club have managed to do a very hard thing. They have acted on the belief that every child on the team who puts in the work and suits up for competition deserves the same attention, the same level of coaching. The national record holder and the less obviously gifted athlete are treated with equal care and concern. Personal growth along with shared responsibility really matter in practice and at the meets. Teach the tools of achievement and success, and leave winning to take care of itself.

While few, if any, of our children will be professional ball players or Olympic athletes, they all will be professional human beings who must strive to build a good life and feel some sense of achievement. Can we consider the benefits to everyone of creating more players instead of more spectators? Shouldn't we leave the judgment on talent until later down the road, and try to give the kids a little more help and time to learn along the way?

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