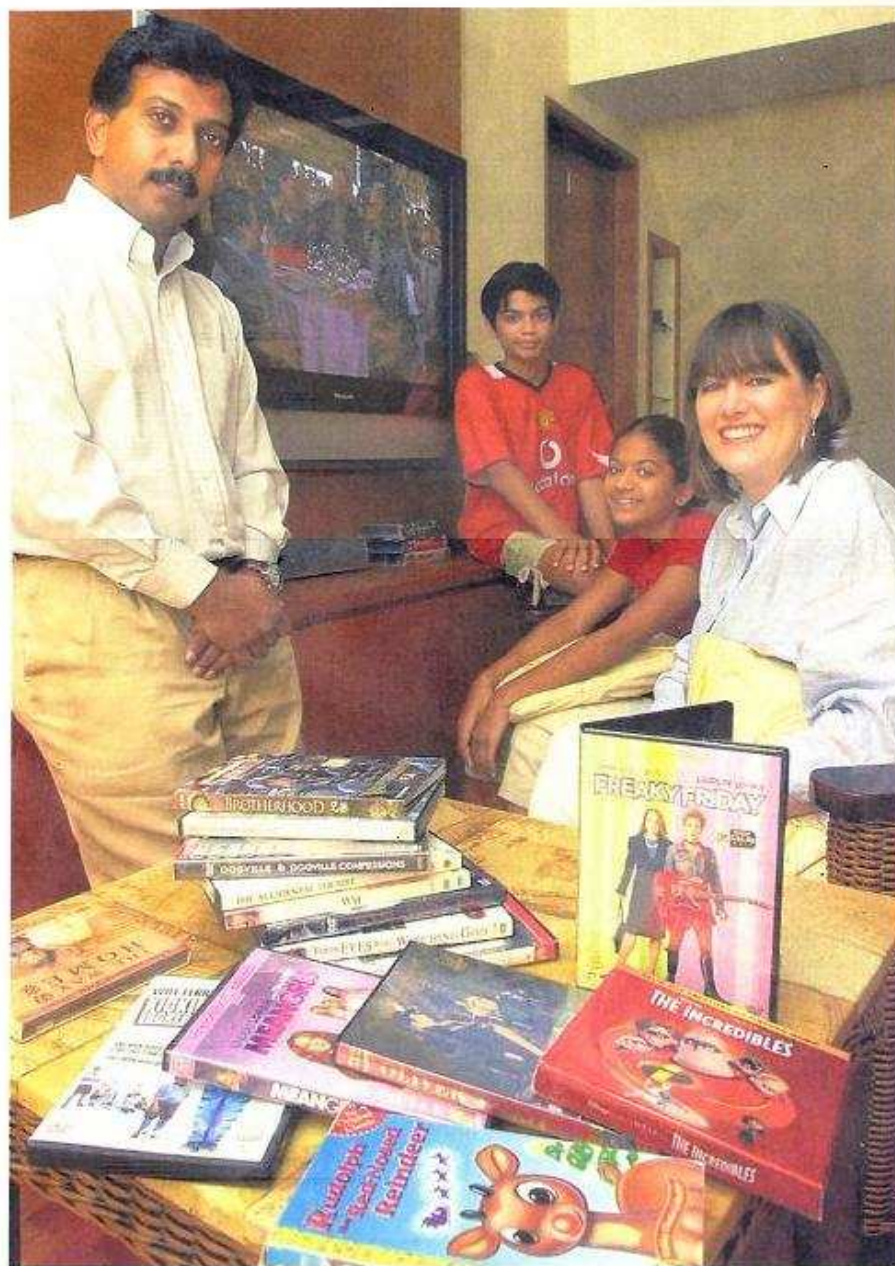


For the love of movies: John and Karen Louis with their children Sonia and David and some of the films they use in therapy.

picture | chong jun liang



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## Movie Therapy uses films to help people work out their life issues

**G**IVEN that Singapore has one of the highest cinema attendances in the world, vis a vis its population, you would not be way off in coming to two conclusions.

One, that we like to be in the dark. Or two, we don't have much else to do.

You would be quite erroneous in that hasty judgement.

A simpler generalisation is, we do so like to go to the pictures — a new movie opens every Thursday — because we like to feel good.

Many a movie can deliver that basic emotion — relief that your life's not nearly as bad (or is at least better) than the one the character's going through up there on the screen.

Now there's Movie Therapy which takes going to the cinema a notch higher.

### BREAKTHROUGH APPROACH

Movie Therapy is a breakthrough approach that uses films to help people work out their life issues with a qualified counsellor.

(American Dr Gary Solomon is the creator of cinematherapy, circa 1970s, watching specific movies to heal emotional problems.)

There's reel food for thought.

A \$9 ticket, a bag of popcorn and reflections in a darkened hall showing *The Break Up*. Where's the need to consult an analyst, only to have him repeat what you've already gleaned from the film: Have relationships with people, not with things (in *The Break Up*, it's an apartment).

Replacing psychotherapy with a prescribed DVD?

And why not? Valium, Prozac or Jack Nicholson? Hit me, Jack!

Movie Therapy is one of the tools that the husband-and-wife team of John and Karen Louis employ to help people gain self-awareness.

The couple, in their 40s, met in London — no, not in the theatre. Both were studying in England then, about 20

**FEELING BLUE?  
FORGET THE THERAPIST**

# WATCH MOVIES



Marlon Brando the don: No, no, not on the cheeks, kiss the hand.



Darth Vader to Luke Skywalker: Son, give up now, mine are Duracell Bunny batteries.



Sean Connery (father) to Harrison Ford (Indiana Jones): Junior, you know those Boy Scout knots I taught you, well forget them now, use a knife, you silly boy!

## So, what type are you?

THINK of it as Hollywood Homeopathy.

John and Karen Louis, counsellors with HOPE worldwide (Singapore), use films in Movie Therapy to help you feel better about yourself, such as *Shall We Dance* (absent dad), *Cool Runnings* (fear of failing), *Little Brother* (sibling rivalry), *Dogville* (pure pain), *Groundhog Day* (selfishness is futile), *Chariots of Fire* (try and try again), *Truly Madly Deeply* (bereavement).

Now, purely for entertainment — and isn't that what movies are all about — make a list of preferred films and characters you most identify with to arrive at some home truths about yourself. Particularly if it's a slasher movie...

(If you have the most affinity for *Interview With A Vampire*, let me tell you that I am never

home at night.)

Comedies and tragedies can be both inspirational and motivational. Also note that in sci-fi films all the aliens speak English (except when dubbed).

Here's a list to start you off on some therapeutic fun with other movie buffs.

Well-known trilogies — *The Godfather*, *Indiana Jones*, *Lord of the Rings*, *the Matrix*, *Mission Impossible*, *Star Wars*, *X-Men* — are mighty long-winded ways to get across a basic tenet.

Take *Godfather*, *Jones*, *Wars*.

What do they confirm? The age-old homily that father knows best.

*Rings* and *X-Men* show you can be quite different from the rest of the world — extraordinarily large hairy feet, cheap coloured

contact lenses — and still live happily ever after.

*The Matrix*? You tell me. I missed the point, distracted by the overcoats and Raybans.

*Mission Impossible* proves that Tom Cruise is vain, *Pirates of the Caribbean* is about how to deal with a hangover, and *Popeye* is for vegans (besides being the only movie left which can show smoking).

For those in a relationship rut, there's *Before Sunrise*. If embarking on an affair, see *Bridges Of Madison County* (and forget it, because he can't look anything like Clint Eastwood).

The longest running series of films is the James Bond franchise (some 20 in 40 years) which teaches that men will always be boys.

And if there's a lesson to learn from *Basic Instinct*, it is: Always wear underwear, in case you get hauled into a police station.

plus years ago.

John and Karen are qualified counsellors and co-founders of HOPE worldwide (Singapore) a faith-based charity.

They have conducted MT Workshops (since 2004) for schools and companies and individuals. No guesses it's a popular form (picture it, Hollywood for homework).

Singapore is home to Karen — an American, this year is her 20th National Day. They have two children, Sonia, 14, and David, 12.

According to the Louis' experience, the prevalent issues concerning Singaporeans are "marriage, teenagers, work-life balance, stress, status, being assertive".

John gave the big picture: "In a marriage, the father may be extremely absent; with adolescents, it's having less respect for authority; in the workplace, bosses keep telling you what to do.

These are common problems."

There is more than one movie to address each of those significant worries. Before I could press home a blockbuster title to combat the above issues, Karen said: "Movies are a tool, not the solution."

The reason movies work, Karen explained, is, when a troubled person finds it difficult to express his problem, one less painful way is to project it through a character, for example, the film *About Schmidt*.

"About Schmidt," Karen said, "is about a man who did not invest enough time with his family. His wife dies and later he tries to convince his daughter not to marry a man he believes is a nincompoop."

"A lot of men go through that, the film makes you think back, with some regrets."

"But it's not a life wasted when you build in new meaning."

There is no such thing as a hopeless film.

Karen said: "The movie itself can be lousy, like *North*, which was utterly panned, but there are poignant moments — the kid feels his parents don't like him — that teaches something."

"Freaky Friday is an excellent movie for parents to learn how to listen to their children."

Karen cited *Forrest Gump* when she talked to a young group on *How To Avoid Marrying A Jerk*.

"It educates singles on not being naive when starting to date."

When Karen met John, both found their favourite film at the time was *Gandhi*. The kids love *Mean Girls* (against bullying and about being yourself) and the title that crops up most is *Life As A House*.

John said: "This is a film that addresses many family issues, everyone

can relate to something in it."

For copyright reasons, the film as a tool cannot be shown in its entirety, but up to 50 per cent is allowed. Often 10-minute scenes are used to stress a point.

Don't get John and Karen started on MT recommendations, there are an inordinate number. But there are not too many local titles on their PDA catalogue yet.

Karen said they are looking at Japanese and Korean and Hong Kong films. "I Not Stupid is a good example of teen stress," she said.

What then about people who practically grew up at the movies — shouldn't they be the most well-balanced among us?

Not if, like Roger Ebert (I usually sit a couple of rows behind him in Cannes), you fall asleep during much of the feature-length.