




FILM: **LIFE ANIMATED**

FDG RATING: 3.75 

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Roger Ross Williams: *Director*

Ron Suskind: *journalist, father of Owen, author of Life Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*

Owen Suskind

DATE: August 21, 2016

### DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **LIFE ANIMATED (documentary)**

Our film discussion group agreed that Life Animated is a pretty amazing film, awarding it a rating of 3.75 (5 is the highest). A true story about Owen Suskind, a toddler who is playful, imaginative, and “normal” until at the age of 3 he completely withdraws into autism. His parents are truly inspiring as they refuse to stop searching for a way to communicate with their son and provide whatever support he needs. Fortunately, Owen’s father, Ron Suskind, is a successful journalist so the family can afford to seek out whatever seems to be the best school, therapy, and doctors, for their son. But it is the animated characters in Disney films that turn out to be Owen’s salvation. He identifies with specific characters who are experiencing challenges and having feelings similar to his own and in this way he is able to start to make sense of the overwhelming chaos around him.

Probably the most touching scene in the film is when Owen’s father, who has not been able to communicate with his son, notices a character puppet by Owen’s bed, and pretending to be the character as he gestures with the puppet’s arms, says a few lines from the film. Owen responds. This cataclysmic moment turns the corner for Owen’s family and for Owen as they start to use Disney films and characters to communicate with their son. Amazingly, Owen has already memorized every line of every Disney film he has watched. It was touching and inspiring to watch Owen’s progress. Although because of his autism, he will always have an uphill battle to survive in this world, his communication skills and interactive skills have developed enormously. Another high point in the film shows Owen leading a Disney film discussion group that he organized for other young people with communication disabilities. They discuss how the film makes them feel and which characters they identify with and why.

Toward the end of the film, we see his therapist prepare him for a job interview at a movie theater. He deservedly gets the job. A very powerful closing scene shows Owen, now 26, being invited to speak at a world conference on autism in Paris. He describes how Disney films helped him cope and understand his tumultuous world.

Some of our reviewers felt that Life Animated was a vanity project for the family. Others criticized the amateur quality of the film and felt it didn’t hold their interest. But others thought it was well done and appreciated the importance of the story. Interjecting an animated mini film that brought to life Owen’s own story he wrote and illustrated where he is the hero of the side kicks, was very creative and effective.

I’ve always loved the more creative animated films but now have a huge appreciation for the power of Disney characters.

A consistent rating of 3.5 with one enthusiastic 4.5 resulted in a happily ever after cumulative 3.75.



See you at the movies!

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[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer