



FILM: **MINARI**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺○○

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

Lee Isaac Chung: *director, writer*
Steven Yeun: *actor, Jacob*
Han Ye-ri: *actress, Monica*
Youn Yuhjung: *actress, Grandma*
Alan S. Kim: *actor, David*

DATE: May 16, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **MINARI**

Winning the 2021 Golden Globe for best foreign language film, *Minari* is based on Lee Isaac Chung's experience growing up as the son of Korean immigrants, after his dad moved the family to rural Arkansas to start a farm. The deeply personal film is a heartwarming family saga with Jacob determined to break away from the monotonous chicken sexing job (checking the gender of thousands of chicks a day, the females are kept for eggs and meat; the males are discarded) he and his wife have been doing for the past ten years in California and barely scraping by. He believes that they stand a better chance in Arkansas. He wants to realize his dream of owning a farm raising Korean fruits and vegetables to sell to restaurant food suppliers. His wife Monica hasn't fully bought into Jacob's dream. Nevertheless, Jacob buys land in the rugged Ozarks of Arkansas, drives cross country with his wife and two children, young David and school-age Ann.

They finally pull up to their new home, and he proudly shows off the disappointing pre-fab house propped up on cinder blocks. Back in the '80s, Chung's dad tried to do the same thing, which explains why "*Minari*" is told from the perspective of young David, who's fast asleep in the back seat when the family pulls in to their driveway for the first time. Despite repeated squabbles with Monica, challenges working the land, and difficulty finding business owners who would purchase his Korean vegetables, Jacob's resilience holds the family together even when his wife is ready to give up. During one of their parents' squabbles, the two children make paper airplanes that say "Don't fight" and launch them into their parents' midst. We were relieved that the family did not experience prejudice and ugly racism although we did see insensitive questions from two ignorant kids they meet at church. It might have been more significant in his real life but Chung did not focus on it in his film.

Some discussion participants thought the film was slow but we agreed the arrival of Grandma really livens things up. Discouraged, disheartened, and tired of squabbling with Jacob, Monica agrees to stick it out if her mother can come to help with the kids. Grandma is a kick to watch, deservedly earning a best supporting actress Oscar for her performance. She drinks, cusses, plays cards, gambles, loves to watch boxing. Young David says to her, "You're not a real grandma." He complains she smells like Korea. And he stubbornly declares that real grandmas bake cookies, they don't swear, and don't wear men's underwear. He has a heart murmur so his attentive mom is constantly forbidding him from running. Grandma makes him drink a foul-tasting Asian herbal remedy she concocts but he plays a trick on her by preparing an even yuckier cocktail for her to drink. Another favorite scene is in church as the donation jar is passed around, Monica put in \$100 which Grandma discretely takes back when the jar is passed to her.

We appreciated the colorful characters. The Jesus freak was exceptionally weird but it was interesting to see how Jacob interacted with him. One discussion participant did not like his character at all saying he was a terrible representation of country folk.

There is drama and tragedy but the family becomes closer as a result.

Tying back to the title, the grandmother brought minari cuttings from Korea that she plants on a small hill along the river bank where the soil is moist. It is an extremely popular plant in Asia used in many foods. A traditional folk medicine since antiquity, and minarinis believed to have a detoxifying effect. When the plant is thriving at the end of the film, she says, "The wind is blowing, the minari are bowing as if they're saying thank you."

A pleasant, gentle film, we wondered what made it achieve Golden Globe best foreign language film status? As one discussion participant observed, "It's not all it is cracked up to be."

A heartwarming family saga with a good ensemble and satisfying ending, we gathered a tepid 3.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best).



See you at the movies!

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