

Jobs

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V -1; L -4; S/N -2.

Running time: 2 hours 8 min.

Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.'

Matthew 9:17

I have never owned an Apple computer, and yet, as this biopic shows so well, I am in Steve Job's debt anyway, as are all the other millions of home computer users around the world. The fact that at times he was a selfish, arrogant "a-h-," as his boss at Altari calls him, makes no difference. The strong point of the script and of Ashton Kutcher's performance is that they show us a man who was smart and clever, but not always kind or thoughtful of the feelings and welfare of others. Indeed, if we compare this film to *Social Network*, then the founder of Face Book looks like Fred Rogers compared to the founder of Apple!

Unfolding as a series of flashbacks from the year 2001, the story begins in the 70s when Jobs enrolled briefly in Reed College, but then dropped out, which of course worries his father (actually his adoptive father). He stays around the campus dropping in on classes, going barefoot. There follows his series of experiments—art classes, a calligraphy course, LSD tripping, a real trip to India, yoga meditation, his job at the computer game company Altari, then his joining forces with computer programmer/tinkerer Steve Wozniak (Josh Gad) and their co-founding of Apple in the garage of Steve Jobs' father. We see that the genius of Jobs is not based on his digital expertise but his ability see the potential in a

device missed by everyone else, one combining a typewriter, a TV set and a small computer. In a scene unfolding in a multilevel parking garage we see that even "The Woz," as Wozniak is nicknamed, would not have seen the potential of his computer invention but for the passionate explanation by Jobs of what could be done with his new creation.

It is amusing to see and hear Jobs, during a series of telephone calls to solicit startup money, trying to explain his concept of a computer in every home at a time when everyone's idea of a computer was an IBM behemoth taking up several rooms and requiring a huge amount of coolant to keep the heat from its vacuum tubes under control. This sequence took me back to the seemingly ancient days before Sputnik when as a science fiction fan I would try to explain to a skeptic that rockets could work in space even though, as they ignorantly argued "there was no air to push against."

Successful at delivering 500 computer motherboards to a computer hobby shop owner, Apple really takes off when Mike Markkula (Dermot Mulroney), once an Intel engineer, shows up and invests his bankroll in the company. With the Apple II dominating the market that Jobs virtually created, Steve and his associates become wealthy when the company goes public. However, not *all* of his first associates share the wealth, as we see in the unsavory scene in which he refuses to include several of his garage day employees because he deems them unworthy. We also see his cruelty in his firing publicly those whom he thinks are uncreative and thus unable to see his plans for the future of a project. He also breaks up with his live-in girl friend when she becomes pregnant, and, despite paternity tests, refuses to acknowledge that he is the father of their daughter Lisa. And yet later he names one of his computer projects "Lisa," and apparently off-screen comes to some kind of an acceptance of her, as an older Lisa shows up near the end of the film. Unfortunately the script omits what must have been an interesting reconciliation.

One of the great ironies of Job's career is that the company he co-founded becomes dominated by those more concerned about profits than innovation. They are content with old wine and old wineskins, but the man who co-founded the company wants to press on, eager for new wine and new wineskins. Worried over the expenditures he demands for a new and risky project, Apple's board forces him into the role of a figurehead, something that he is not content with. The rest of the film deals with his founding another company and then coming back to save floundering Apple from bankruptcy. The film concludes in the 90s before his battle with cancer. It leaves us wrestling with the question of what kind of a human being was Steve Jobs? That he inspired a great many people to great achievements we can see whenever we look at and use a home computer. As a creative genius he is like many artists and musicians, gifted in some ways but unable to empathize with and relate warmly to other people.

Some things that might have added to our understanding of Jobs—details of his faith and practice of Zen Buddhism, his co-founding of Pixar Studios and executive producing *Toy Story*, and his meeting and 1991 marriage to Laureen Powell (we do see her briefly near the end of the film). Because of its failings this film might actually help the one Aaron Sorkin is adapting from Walter Isaacson's exhaustive 2011 biography, written with the cooperation of its subject.

The full review with a set of 5 questions for reflection or discussion appears in the Sep/Oct issue of Visual Parables, which will be available on Sep. 23 when VP's new site is launched.