

My Sister's Keeper (2009)

Rated PG-13. Our ratings: V-1 ; L-2 ; S/N-3 . Running time: 1 hour 48 min.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

I used to think that Susan Kate, Sara, and Anna Sarandon was the fiercest mother Fitzgerald face some stormy hen (remember Lorenzo's Oil?) intimes.

the movies, but now I must add

Cameron Diaz as the Mother You

Don't Want to Mess With When It

Comes to A Sick Child. In this

adaptation of Jodi Picoult's

2004 bestseller, My Sister's

Keeper, Sara Fitzgerald has

three children, Jesse Fitzgerald

(Evan Ellingson and), Kate

Fitzgerald (Sofia Vassilieva),

and Anna (Abigail Breslin), but

it is the dangerously ill Kate

who receives all of her maternal

attention, often to the

consternation of older brother

and younger sister. Not only

does Sara, in a sense, sacrifice

her son and other daughter to

Kate's welfare, she also gives

2009 New Line Cinema (Warner Bros. Pictures)

up her lucrative career as a rising lawyer.

When she was about two Kate contracted a virulent form of leukemia, with the doctors telling the parents that she has but a few years to live. The doctor also suggests that if they can conceive another child, Kate's life will be extended because the blood and bodies of the two siblings will be a good match. She and husband Brian (Jason Patric) do, and soon Anna is giving blood, and over the years blood marrow as well. Her life seems to be an endless round of sometimes painful medical procedures, but she has always undergone them without complaint—until she is told that Kate needs a new kidney.

Anna is eleven, and as we see in many tender scenes, she and Kate do love each other, sharing a room and secrets like any sisters who are raised in love. However, now Anna declares that she is tired of all the pain and anxiety. There is no guarantee that a new kidney will make any difference in Kate's march toward death, other than to delay it for a while, and the prospect of living with just one of her own kidneys is more than she can take. Without telling her parents she visits a lawyer whose ads she has seen on TV, Campbell Alexander (Alec Baldwin). Although taken aback by her request for what he reveals is "medical emancipation," he is impressed by her circumstances and her determination. The \$700 she has been able to gather together from her babysitting and gifts is far less than his usual fee, but he agrees to represent her pro bono.

Sara is extremely upset when the legal papers are served, but fortunately Anna's father Brian, the chief at the town fire station, can understand Anna's feelings, and so becomes the mediator between she-tiger mother and rebellious cub. He can see how the family already is being sundered by his wife's over-emphasis on their sick daughter, but hitherto he has felt compelled to support Sara.

Nick Cassavetes, director of another film dealing with death and loss, *The Notebook*, joins with co-writer Jeremy Leven to offer a tear-inducing film that does not devolve into a tear-jerker. His cast is perfect—Carmen Diaz is the kind of mother all of us would want were we deathly ill; Abigail Breslin is her usual competent, lovable self; and the little-known Sofia Vassilieva wrings our hearts as the plucky older sister who realizes what her illness is doing to her family, and especially to the sister she loves so much. Jason Patric is just right as the father who has held back his emotions, but who at the mere exchange of a glance with his daughters, or the raise of an eyebrow during one of his wife’s outbursts, communicates his love and anguish without recourse to words. An added touch of poignancy is Joan Cusack as Judge De Salvo, whose recent loss of her own daughter enables her to understand what the Fitzgeralds are going through. A fine film for parents and other adults to watch and reflect upon their own experiences and beliefs about death and the need to let go.

For Reflection/Discussion

There are definitely spoilers toward the end of this section!

1. How did you feel when Anna reveals her intent to sue for her “medical emancipation” ? Do you think that Sara is right when she says Anna is too young to understand the situation? Did you think at first that Anna was selfish in her plan? And yet, from what we see of her, does she seem like a selfish person?
2. How would you feel if you learned that you were conceived primarily for the welfare of another member of the family? How is Anna a “used person” ? What do you think of the ethics of this use of vitro fertilization?
3. The least developed part of the story is that of Jesse:

what do you think he has been going through as the oldest child of the family? In what ways do we see that he is a giving person?

4. What do you think of lawyer Campbell Alexander? How do we see that he is not just a flashy, greedy lawyer?

5. What does Kate's affair with fellow patient Taylor Ambrose (Thomas Dekker) add to the story? Can you condemn or condone what the two do in the empty wing of the hospital?

6. At what points do you see grace in the film? The lawyer's taking the case pro bono? The effect Brian has on his family? Anna's sacrifices through the years? Above all, what Kate puts Anna up to?

7. How is Sara a good example of one who cannot let go? What insights does "The Preacher" offer in the Scripture passage above? What inescapable "seasons of life" have you gone through?

8. Anna comes to the conclusion: "There's no reason for it, I guess—death's just death—nobody understands it." How is she right in a way? And how wrong are those who do try to "explain" death by saying such inanities as "God wanted another little angel, so he took...!") Compare her conclusion with Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and Philippians 1:21-23. Which take on death do you find most helpful? Why?

9. What do you think of the advice of Kate's New Age relatives—about as "comforting" as the three friends of Job? How is this actually laying a heavy burden on the patient: perhaps implying that if she does not get well, it is her fault? How are they like those described in Proverbs 25:20? How is it better sometimes just to "be present," and to say as little as possible, other than expressions of love?

10. We see little if any evidence of a religious faith in the

immediate family: how might this have helped them during their long period of crisis? What might you say to them were they to turn to you? How is their annual trip to Montana an attempt to remove or ameliorate the sting of death? Check out what the apostle Paul says about the sting of death in 1 Corinthians 15.