

This Oscar-Nominated Film Affirms the Purpose of My Journey with Cerebral Palsy

A political science professor of mine from Cedarville University, Mark Smith, recently wrote that “Science fiction is at its best when it holds up a polished mirror, so that the viewer might see themselves more starkly in sharp relief,” in his review of the Oscar-nominated film *Arrival*.

Not since the theatrical release of *The Giver* have I seen a science fiction film that grapples with the importance of choosing life but does so in a way that is positively subversive and mirrors an aspect of my own story. I’ve written previously about pro-life themes found in popular science fiction films, cautioning that these life-or-death stories sometimes venture into dark places.

Nominated for multiple Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director (Denis Villeneuve) and Best Adapted Screenplay, *Arrival* tells the story of Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams), a language expert, in a place of loss and loneliness, who is called upon by Colonel Weber (Forest Whitaker) of the U.S. Army to translate a sample of extraterrestrial language from a vessel hovering over an undisclosed location in the western United States.

In pursuing strategies for how to communicate with these other-worldly visitors, designated “heptapods,” Banks works with physicist Ian Donnelly (Jeremy Renner) to dismantle the language barrier from both linguistic and scientific points of view while attempting to maintain communication with other sites worldwide that also host identical alien vessels.

Louise begins to make breakthroughs in communicating with the heptapods. Yet human communication between the host sites

falter, and she experiences visions she cannot understand.

As these visions grow stronger, the context of her recent loss becomes clearer, and the question of meaningful choice manifests in a way that is familiar to all of us: If we had the capacity to change things about our life, would we?

During my senior year in college, I was asked that exact question as part of a Q&A session at Cedarville University, alongside other students who had various disabilities. The panelist next to me, diagnosed with spina bifida, said he wouldn't change anything. In a moment of brutal honesty, I admitted: "I don't know."

Born 10 weeks premature 30-plus years ago, at a time when such a degree of underdevelopment was a death sentence, and the doctors made their prognosis very clear to my parents, I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. During a difficult birth process, doctors wanted to halt the efforts to keep me alive, but my parents persisted in the fight for life.

Within that context, and dealing with joint pain and muscle fatigue since my freshman year of college related to the cerebral palsy that had only intensified, I sat on that stage in my early 20s—in the midst of one of the hardest years of my life.

A decade-plus later, I sat with my mom, on my birthday, as she commented that she didn't think she could've written the overarching plot of my nearly 35 years on Earth so far if she'd tried. I responded, "Of course you couldn't have, mom! You don't have the ability to see the future—and if you did, you might have written it differently."

She had been with me during months of horrible hospital stays, wherein I came face-to-skull with the Grim Reaper—a figure who seemed to stare back at me from the mirror. Her response was telling: "Aaron, I would not have changed anything because it's made you who you are."

By the film's end, it is my assessment that Louise's answer in *Arrival* is the same as my mother's, that despite the difficulty, darkness and devastation she's already experienced—with likely more to come—Louise wouldn't change the circumstances her visions allude to. Within those circumstances resides beauty worth beholding, wonder worth witnessing and a love worth lavishing on a future family.

I suspect that if Louise Banks and my mom ever met in real life, they'd have much in common—and a lot to talk about.

*A native of Canton, Michigan, **Aaron Welty** served as a congressional staffer for five years and now works in the federal government. He is a graduate of Cedarville University. An inspiring speaker who has addressed Star Wars Celebration and AwesomeCon, Welty has been featured on NBC Nightly News, Roll Call and The Daily Signal. He is currently writing his first book.*

Reprinted with permission from Bound4LIFE International.