

Eva's 2024 Movies. Films based on a true story precede fiction. Otherwise, order is not significant. November 19, 2024

1. *My Octopus Teacher* ©2020. Dirs. James Reed & Pippa Erlich. 90 min. Documents a year spent by filmmaker Craig Foster getting close to an octopus. Recommended by Ed. Deservedly won the 2021 Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. Briefly touches on Foster's sharing the natural world with his son. The octopus regenerates a limb after a shark attack! Good music.
2. *The Society of Snow* ©2023. Dir. J.A. Bayona. 144 min. Netflix. Enjoyed with Sue Baker Olson. I already knew the story of the Uruguayan rugby team's survival in the Andes after a plane crash, but I was gripped all over again by this new film.
3. *Origin* ©2023. Dir. Ava DuVernay. 141 min. Conveys the thesis of Isabel Wilkerson's book *Caste* by portraying Isabel's (A. Ellis-Taylor) life during the 5 years she conceived, researched, and wrote it. With Jon Bernthal as Isabel's husband. In Germany Isabel researches how Nazis studied Jim Crow laws. In India she contemplates the Dalits (untouchables). Hulu.
4. *Ethel* (1928-2024) ©2012. Dir. Rory Kennedy. 97 min. Documentary. The DVD extras showed Ethel (and 25 other family members) at the premiere at Sundance. It's an upbeat, enjoyable movie. Many of Rory's 8 surviving siblings are interviewed. Home movie footage. Ethel and Jean Kennedy had been roommates in college. Ethel enjoyed campaigning.
5. *Rose* ©2022. Dir. Niels Arden Oplev. 106 min. Dramatic re-enactment of a 1-week bus tour to Paris in 1997 taken by the director's two sisters and brother-in-law. One of the sisters, Inger (Sophie Grabel), had suffered from schizophrenia for 20 years, since she was 19, and except for this vacation, was a resident of a sheltered home. Inger looked up an old flame in Paris. Kudos to the tour group, and Inger & her family, for making the trip work for all. Watched via my Prime Video app.
6. *The Boys in the Boat* ©2023. Dir. George Clooney. 124 minutes. Based on the 2013 book by Daniel James Brown about the U. of Washington's rowing team in the 1936 Olympics, with Callum Turner as Joe Rantz, Joel Edgerton as Coach Al Ulbrickson, Jack Mulhern as the shy rower who played the piano (I loved that scene), & Jyuddah Jaymes as Jesse Owens.
7. *Ezra* ©2023. Dir. Tony Goldwyn. 100 min. Divorced comedian Max Brandel (Bobby Cannavale) struggles to raise his autistic son Ezra. The director Tony Goldwyn plays Bruce, Ezra's mother's new partner, a lawyer. Robert De Niro plays Max's father, with whom he lives. Rose Byrne plays Jenna, Ezra's mother. Rainn Wilson plays Max's best friend, Nick. The movie is loosely based on screenwriter Tony Spiridakis's personal experience raising a child with autism. William A. Fitzgerald, an actual autistic boy, about 11, plays Ezra. Vera Farmiga & Whoopi Goldberg are in it. Prime Video.
8. *Reagan* ©2024. Dir. Sean McNamara. 135 min. W/ Dennis Quaid as Ronald Reagan. Penelope Ann Miller as Nancy, and Dan Lauria as Tip O'Neill. I like bio flicks, especially ones that remind me of events during my own lifetime. This movie emphasized Reagan's anti-communism & personal kindness (stay through the credits to see what happened with the goldfish). Courting Nancy he humbly admitted to being "damaged goods"—divorced with children, acting career in freefall. The famous quote during the 1984 debate with Walter Mondale is shown: "I promise I will not make age an issue in this campaign. I will not exploit your youth and inexperience." Seen in a theater with Sue Denison. Reagan gracefully acknowledged his dementia shortly after retirement. He rode off to the tune of "Country Roads" & lived another 10 years.
9. *The Apprentice* ©2024. Dir. Ali Abbasi. 123 min. Sebastian Stan plays DJT. Covers his life from the early '70s when he was collecting rents door to door, to the early 1990s when he's having a conversation with Tony Schwartz about writing *The Art of the Deal*. His divorce from Ivana and the failure of his casinos had not happened yet. I did not think it was defamatory (any publicity is good publicity) but the real DJT trashed it as FAKE, which probably dampened its box office appeal with the MAGA crowd. Friends on my side of the divide wonder why I went to see it. (I'm glad I did). As for the lawsuit Trump threatened, Abbasi said, "Bring it on. I'm back safe in Europe so I'm not afraid anymore."
10. *Where's My Roy Cohn?* ©2019. Dir Matt Tyrnauer. 97 min. Documentary. After seeing video of Roy Cohn (1927-86), I realize how well-cast Jeremy Strong was as R.C. in *The Apprentice*. Newsreel footage of the Rosenberg trial, the McCarthy hearings, & clients ranging from the Mafia to the Archdiocese of NY. Roy Cohn was a mentor to Donald Trump. Clips of Gore Vidal and Morley Schaffer with Cohn. Talking heads: Cohn's cousins, Ken Auletta, Roger Stone. Roy Cohn's rules: 1. Deny deny deny. 2. Attack/countersue. 3. Never admit or confess; Forget the law. Who's the judge? Bully. Blackmail.
11. *The Normal Heart* ©2014. Dir Ryan Murphy, based on the play by Larry Kramer. 132 min. Set in 1981-84. In the DVD extras, Larry Kramer makes clear that the character played by Mark Ruffalo models Larry Kramer. Jim Parsons (Sheldon from *The Big Bang*) is in it. Julia Roberts plays a doctor who for a long time was the only doctor in NYC who would take on AIDS patients. She's in a wheelchair (polio). She says, "Polio's a virus too. No one gets it anymore." By 2023 42.3 million people had died of AIDS globally (I googled it). 2020-April 13, 2024 7,010,681 people had died from COVID-19.
12. *The Holdovers* ©2023. Dir. Alexander Payne. 133 min. Paul Giamatti plays a curmudgeonly classics teacher at a boys' prep school in New England assigned to supervise 5 students who are staying on campus for the Christmas holidays. Angus is played by Dominic Sessa, Da'Vine Joy Randolph won the Oscar for Best Supporting actress. Set in the Viet Nam era.
13. *Past Lives* ©2023. Dir. Celine Song. 106 min., with Greta Lee, Teo Yoo, and John Magaro. We first meet 12-yr.-old friends Nora & Hae Sung (a boy) in Korea, but Nora's family is emigrating to Toronto. We next see Nora at 24 in NYC trying to make it as a playwright. Hae Sung finds her on the internet and they enjoy meetings on Zoom. Nora initiates a pause. She meets Arthur, a writer. They marry. Hae Sung gets a girlfriend, but they do not marry. 12 years later he visits NYC. Nora suspects, then is sure, that Hae Sung's trip's primary purpose is to see her again. IMHO it was well worth the trip. Arthur's a little insecure—the other two share a language. Each of the trio's emotions is conveyed without weakening the marriage.
14. *American Fiction* ©2023. Dir. Cord Jefferson. 117 min. Based on the 2001 novel *Erasure* by Percival Everett. Thelonious "Monk" Ellison (Jeffrey Wright) is a serious black writer who shuns Blaxploitation. His sister Lisa (Tracee Ellis Ross) was a fascinating character. I was sorry when she exited the story early. I liked the MA settings (Boston & beach house) and the family dynamics. Monk owed to his love interest Coraline (Erika Alexander) an answer to her question "How can you afford this?" (A quality Memory Care home for his mother). He had tossed off a Blaxploitation piece under a pseudonym, and to his horror it paid more than his serious writing.

15. *The Zone of Interest* ©2023. Dir. Jonathan Glazer. 106 min. Documentary. Prime Video. Based loosely on the 2014 novel by Martin Amis. Won Oscar for Best International Feature. Depicts the idyllic family life of Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel), his wife Hedwig (Sandra Hüller), and their 5 children without ever showing the Camp, though they lived adjacent. The house was lovely but the hallways were awful. What was the set-designer thinking?
16. *Tell Me a Riddle* ©1980. Dir Lee Grant. 129 min. Based on an award-winning novella by Tillie Olson. First feature film in the U.S. to be written, produced, and directed by women. Starring Lila Kedrova as Eva & Melvin Douglas as David, her husband of 47 years. It has come time to downsize. David wants to sell their house in the Midwest. Eva resists. We see a big family dinner. The old couple fly to Omaha to visit more descendants, then to San Francisco to visit granddaughter Jeannie, who is a nurse. There they run into an old friend, Mrs. Mace, and enjoy a party with other Russian Jewish emigrés at her senior center. Eva, whose days are numbered, dreams of the olden days. David confesses he sold the house while they were away. They fight. They love. Realistic and poignant. Peter Coyote and Nora Heflin as young David and Eva.
17. *Ghostlight* ©2024. Dirs. Alex Thompson & Kelly O’Sullivan. 115 min. Prime Video. This played at Sundance. With Keith & Katherine Kupferer, a real father and daughter, playing Dan & Daisy. The actual wife and mother, Tara Malten, plays Sharon. The movie opens with Dan and Sharon at the high school learning that their daughter is suspended and required to get counseling. Dan, a construction worker poor at expressing his emotions, gets accidentally involved in community theater. Theater is Daisy’s thing so, once Daisy discovers where her father goes at night, this brings them closer. The family is involved in a stressful lawsuit, and failing to process a family trauma. Theater helps them to confront their feelings.
18. *Burn After Reading* ©2008. Dir. Ethan Coen. 97 min. A well-cast farce, with George Clooney, Frances McDormand, Brad Pitt (as a male bimbo), John Malkovich, Tilda Swinton, Richard Jenkins, and J.K. Simmons (as a CIA guy). J.R. Horne was great as Tilda Swinton’s divorce lawyer. Brad Pitt, after reading the script, told the Coens (both wrote the screenplay) he did not know how to play the part because the character was such an idiot. Pause. Then Joel goes “You’ll be fine.” Prime.
19. *The Oak Tree* ©2023. Dir. Ken Loach (87 years old). 113 minutes. Screenplay by Paul Laverty. The title is the name of the (fictional) Pub in a seaside former mining village in County Durham where a Syrian family is re-settled after two years in a refugee camp because housing is available and cheap. Some of the locals are hostile, but TJ Ballantyne, the publican of *The Oak Tree*, is kind to Yara, a young woman of the family with a passion for photography. She’s already documented her life in Syria and the camp. She wants to continue. The community cleans up the back room of the Pub for weekly communal dinners along with slide shows of Yara’s photos. TJ was brought back from the brink of suicide some years earlier by his dog Marra, who is killed during the film. The family learns a beloved relative has died in an Assad prison.
20. *The Midwife* ©2017. Dir. Martin Provost. 117 min. Starring Catherine Frot & Catherine Deneuve. In French with subtitles. Claire (Frot) is 49, a midwife. Claire has last seen Béatrice (Deneuve, who reminded me of Mirka) years ago when she was her father’s mistress. They become friends. Béatrice has a brain tumor. Béatrice believes in the pleasure principle so she continues to indulge in cigarettes and booze. She enjoys the company of men and is in a regular poker game. She’s a lot of fun, singing with Claire’s b.f. Paul while driving his huge truck. Olivier Gourmet plays Paul, who looks a bit like Janusz.
21. *The Conclave* ©2024. Dir. Edward Berger. 120 min. Starring Ralph Fiennes as Cardinal Thomas Lawrence (Is Thomas Cardinal Lawrence an anachronism?), Stanley Tucci as Cardinal Aldo Bellini, John Lithgow as Cardinal Trembley, and Isabella Rossellini as Sr. Agnes. Carlos Dietz plays the missionary Cardinal of Kabul. Sergio Castellitto plays Cardinal Tedesco (the pre-Vatican II conservative). The most prominent Cardinal from the Global South is from Africa, Cardinal Adeyana. Cardinal Bellini, the liberal, says disapprovingly that Adeyama thinks homosexuals should be imprisoned in this life and consigned to Hell in the next. Cardinal Lawrence is in charge of the Conclave, so is prominent and garners votes, but he does not want to be Pope—which Bellini thinks is a qualification in itself. Others are so ambitious they lie and scheme. Cardinal Lawrence makes opening remarks that “Certainty” is the enemy of “Faith.” Lawrence’s struggle is with his prayer life. A cardinal close to the beloved recently deceased Pope confides to another that the Pope had doubts. “About God?!” “No! About The Church.” During the Conclave a suicide bombing in the adjacent square intrudes on the sequestered group. Cardinal Tedesco expresses his opposition to so many Muslims in Europe. The only thing I’m going to give away in this thriller (A reviewer called it “Quality papal pulp”) is that they do elect a new pope. I had looked forward to the white smoke and “Habemus Papem” but this movie is not into those old chestnuts. What’s with the white umbrellas?
22. *Smoke* ©1995. Dir. Wayne Wang. 112 min. Screenplay by Paul Benjamin Auster. Harvey Keitel plays Auggie, proprietor of a tobacco store. Filmed in Brooklyn. Writer Paul Benjamin (Wm. Hurt) is one of his regulars. Paul’s been commissioned to write a Christmas story on deadline, but he hasn’t got an idea. Auggie tells him a true Christmas story. An old ex-girlfriend of Auggie’s shows up (Stockard Channing, one of my favorite actresses), informing him that “their” 18-yr-old daughter is out of control. A friendship develops between a 17-yr-old well-spoken street kid, Rashid (Harold Perrineau) and Paul. Rashid is in search of his father, Cyrus Cole, played by Forest Whitaker. Auggie has a unique photography project.
23. *The Teachers’ Lounge* ©2023 Dir. Ilker Çatak. 98 minutes. Germany’s entry for the Best Foreign Film Oscar. It raises questions about how to maintain discipline in a 6th grade classroom when there’s no proof of who stole. I was impressed by the teacher, played by Leonie Benesch, though she set up an unauthorized camera to catch the thief, a no no. In German, Turkish, English and Polish. I pondered how to handle the suspended student who shows up at school and won’t leave.
24. *The Diplomat* ©2023-2024 (Seasons 1 and 2, 14 episodes altogether.) Dir. Simon Cellan Jones. With Keri Russell as the new American Ambassador to Great Britain, Rufus Sewell as Hal Wyler, her husband, who also has the title “Ambassador” from having been one, though his current role is “just” Ambassador Kate Wyler’s consort, or “wife,” as he calls the role. There’s friction between them—their relationship runs hot and cold. Ezra recommended this political thriller, something between *Homeland* and *Madame Secretary*. Foreign Secretary Austin Dennison is played by David Gyasi, Eidra Park (Ali Ahn) is a CIA officer. Rory Kinnear plays PM Nicol Trowbridge. Ato Essandoh plays Stuart Heyford, Kate Wyler’s top aide in the Embassy, who is sweet on Eidra. Celia Imrie plays Margaret Roylin. Alison Janney (another of my favorite actresses) plays the Vice President. Nana Mensah plays Billie Appiah, the President’s Chief of Staff. Netflix.