



CINEMA
with the

Shepherd



Viewing Guide - Life is Beautiful

(La Vita é Bella)
(1997)

"This is a simple story... but not an easy one to tell." Giosué

SYNOPSIS

A gentle Jewish-Italian waiter, Guido Orefice, meets Dora, a pretty schoolteacher, and wins her over with his charm and humor. Eventually they marry and have a son, Giosué. Their happiness is abruptly halted, however, when Guido and Giosué are separated from Dora and taken to a concentration camp, where Guido is determined to shelter his son from the horrors of his surroundings.

CAST

Roberto Benigni..... Guido
Nicoletta Braschi..... Dora
Giorgio Cantarini..... Giosué

TRIVIA

- Guido's wife, Dora, is played by Roberto Benigni's real-life wife, Nicoletta Braschi.
- The number on Benigni's prison camp uniform is the same number on Charles Chaplin's uniform in *The Great Dictator* (1940), the satire of Hitler and fascism.
- Roberto Benigni says the title comes from a quote by Leon Trotsky. In exile in Mexico, knowing he was about to be killed by Stalin's assassins, he saw his wife in the garden and wrote that, in spite of everything, "life is beautiful".
- Roberto Benigni's Oscar for best actor marked only the second time that an actor had directed himself in an Academy Award winning performance. The other was Laurence Olivier for *Hamlet* (1948).
- Roberto Benigni's Oscar win for Best Actor was the second time a performance completely in Italian had been awarded. The previous winner was Sophia Loren for *Two Women* (1960).
- Before they go to sleep Guido and Ferruccio have a few jokes about the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was a favorite writer of Hitler.
- In Italian, the answer to the "Snow White" riddle is seven "minuti" - a play on words between "minutes" and "dwarves".

"Hold fast to *hope*, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul."
Heb. 6:18-19

QUOTES

Guido: Buon giorno, Principessa

Giosué Orefice: [narrating as an adult] This is my story. This is the sacrifice my father made. This was his gift to me.

Guido: You can lose all your points for any one of three things. One: If you cry. Two: If you ask to see your mother. Three: If you're hungry and ask for a snack! Forget it!

Guido: What are you doing? Were you sleeping?

Ferruccio: Of course I was.

Guido: Hey, you asked me a question a minute ago, you turn your head, and went right to sleep. How'd you do that?

Ferruccio: Schopenhauer.

Guido: Schopenhauer?

Ferruccio: Schopenhauer says that with will power you can do anything. I am what I want to be. And now I want to be someone who's sleeping.

Guido: [casting a spell] Schopenhauer... Will Power...

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.What do you think about this film?
- 2.The film is constructed in two distinct parts: the courtship of Dora by Guido and the events that happen when the family is displaced by war. Why might have Benigni have made this choice?
- 3.Some of the scenes in this part of the film seem fantastic and unrealistic. Why would this be?
- 4.How is it possible that life is beautiful when there are concentration camps?
- 5.Benigni received some criticism for taking a comic slant on Nazi atrocities. Was he being disrespectful?
- 6.Why joke about Schopenhauer?
- 7.What is the source of hope for Giosué? Is it a firm hope, or is it based on lies?
- 8.What is the source of Christian hope?