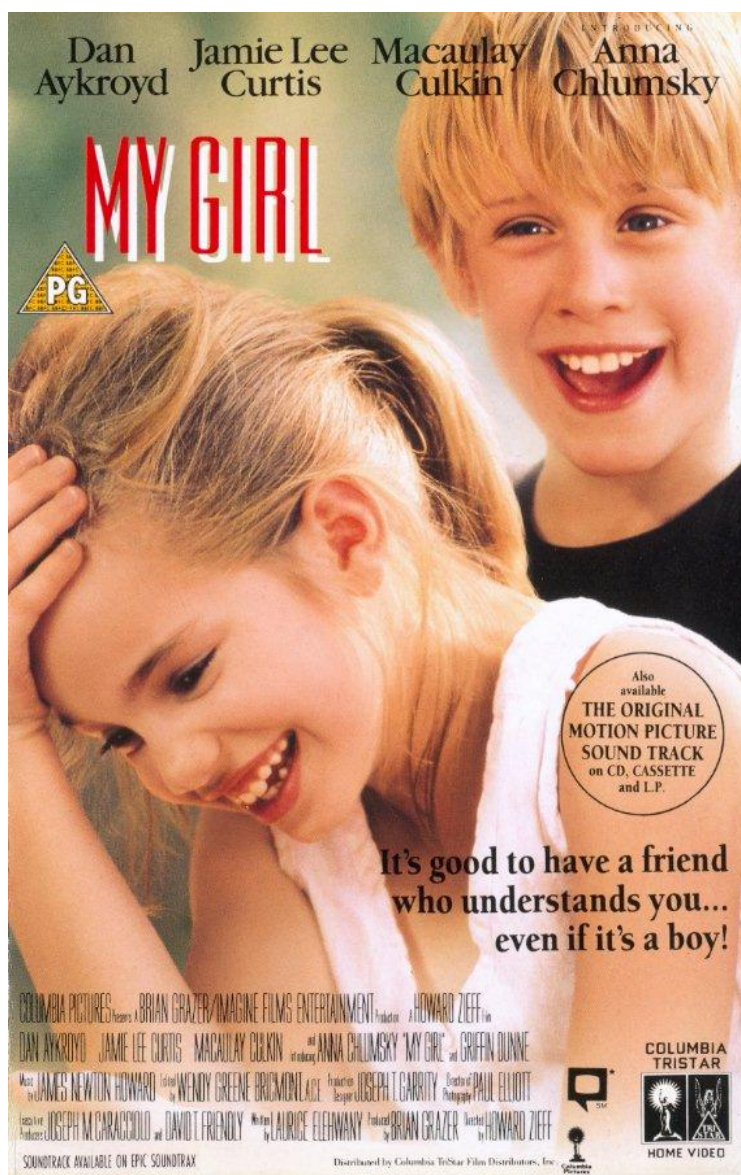


My Girl

US : 1991 : dir. Howard Zieff : Imagine / Columbia : 102 min
 prod: Brian Grazer : scr: Laurice Elehwany : dir.ph.: Paul Elliott
[Anna Chlumsky](#) [d]; [Macaulay Culkin](#)
 Dan Aykroyd; Jamie Lee Curtis; Griffin Dunne; Richard Masur; Ann Nelson; Tom Villard;
 Peter Michael Goetz; Ray Buktenica

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	♂	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5740	6.5	12	10	2,153	3	-	-	-	-	No	unseen

**“It’s good to have a friend who understands you...
 even if it’s a boy!”**



Source for all stills unless indicated: Columbia Tristar VHS CVT 13647



Chlumsky with Jamie Lee Curtis

Empire review:

“Mac is back! Trumpeted as the blond übermoppet’s *[sic]* first starring role since he went ballistic in “**HOME ALONE**”, Culkin actually plays a support role here as the doomed – yeah, the pint-sized megastar bites it, but it’s nowhere near as tragic as hyped in the media – Thomas J., introverted best friend to 11-year old Vada Sultenfuss (newcomer Chlumsky) during the summer of 1972, as she comes to terms with love and death.

Vada is a bright pre-adolescent basket case, living in a spacious home with her weedy mortician father Harry (Aykroyd). Guilt-ridden over her mother’s death in childbirth, Vada is a textbook hypochondriac who spends her summer popping in on the town doc, taking college-level poetry classes with English teacher Griffin Dunne, and cycling around with Culkin, piping along to the late-60s soundtrack.

When distracted Poppa Sultenfuss gets wrapped up in a romance with newly-hired hippy cosmetologist *[sic]* Shelly (Curtis) – the movie’s great unanswered mystery being why Curtis’ wisecracking beatnik falls for Aykroyd’s sack of potatoes – and highly allergic Thomas J. dies from multiple bee stings, poor Vada is finally forced to confront her feelings.

Despite being an entirely formulaic heartstring-tugger with some finger-gagging

moments – Chlumsky sobbing over Culkin’s open casket, “He was going to be an acrobat!” – the performances are appealing, particularly the endearing Chlumsky, and enough tender and comic moments rise above the schmaltz to make it all pleasantly diverting. *** ”

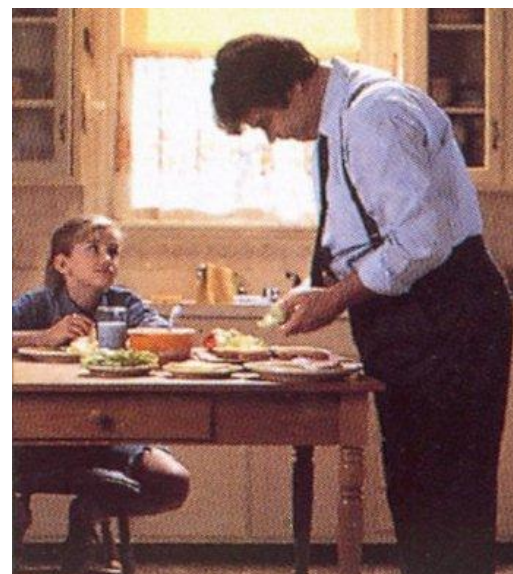
– Matt Mueller

Leonard Maltin’s Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

“Likable if soft-centred tale of an 11-year old girl crying for attention from her widowed father, a mortician who doesn’t know how to reach out to his precocious *[sic]* daughter. Bittersweet comedy touches on love, friendship, puberty, and most of all, death, but its telling moments are muted by an overall air of predictability. Appealing cast sparked by Chlumsky’s mature performance. Followed by a Culkin-less sequel. **1/2 ”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

“Rather pointlessly set in the Seventies, this is a merciless tear-jerker about the 12th summer of the daughter of an undertaker. A hypochondriac tomboy with a crush on her English teacher, her world comes crashing down when her widower father (Dan Aykroyd) takes on a beautician (Jamie Lee Curtis) to make up the corpses’ faces and falls in love with her. The plot is slightly stiffened by the girl’s aged grandma, who never says anything but occasionally bursts vigorously into song,





Your debut film role comes as the central character of a winning box office nostalgia piece – then they go and cast the latest Hollywood wunderkind as the kid-next-door to steal your thunder. Let **that** teach you for playing a “precocious tomboy”, Anna Chlumsky.

and by her friendship with a bespectacled fellow student¹ (Macaulay Culkin) who’s very down-to-earth despite his fragile appearance. The film constantly strives not to be dull, but never quite succeeds, the dialogue needing to

¹ He means of course “classmate” – 11-year olds do not have “fellow students”

be sharper to make up for the lack of variety in the plot. But only the hardest of hearts will resist its massive attack on the tear-ducts in the last 20 minutes. Performances are okay. A poor sequel followed three years later. ** ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“A genuinely touching, frequently hilarious and heartfelt film about the difficult adjustment forced on an 11-year old girl who secretly fears that she was responsible for her mother’s death. Lovable characters and the essence of truth make this a good film for



Do hypochondriacs hurl themselves into lakes? Well this one does.

families to watch and discuss afterward. Rated "PG" for brief vulgarity. **** ”

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Plenty of shrewd commercial calculation went into concocting the right sugar coating for this story of an 11-year old girl’s painful maturation, but chemistry seems right.

Set in an idealised Anytown, USA, supposed to be in Pennsylvania but filmed in Florida, pic can afford to be relatively oblivious to events unfolding in 1972 because the man of the house (Dan Aykroyd) essentially stopped living a decade before. The widower mortician takes barely a passing interest in the doings of his daughter Vada (Anna Chlumsky), an exceedingly bright girl who enrolls in an adult education poetry course because she has a crush [*sic*] on the teacher (Griffin Dunne), and expresses her severe, Woody Allen-like hypochondria by regularly bursting in on a local doctor.

Things change around the funeral home when Dad hires a sexy hippie (Jamie Lee Curtis) to apply make-up to cadavers. Vada spends most of her time with an engaging neighbour

(Macaulay Culkin), and although a bit young for a real romance², the two experience their first kiss together.

It’s a rough summer for an 11-year old, but director Howard Zieff paints it in the manner of a watercolour of a youthful idyll. First-time screenwriter Laurice Elehwany’s script neatly handles a number of details but on larger matters falls into predictable patterns.

Performances are highly simpatico.”

Videocassette – **Columbia Tristar VHS CVT 13647** – sleeve notes:

“Vada (Anna Chlumsky) is a hypochondriac tomboy who lives in an eccentric household headed by her widower/mortician father Harry (Dan Aykroyd). Vada’s world is turned upside down when her Dad for falls for Shelly De Voto (Jamie Lee Curtis) who comes to work at the funeral parlour as a make-up artist. It is a shy, neighbourhood kid, Thomas J. (Macaulay **"HOME ALONE"** Culkin) who understands Vada the best – sharing her jealousy, her first crush [*sic*], her deepest fears, and forcing her to confront a most painful loss. This bittersweet box office smash is a very special story of two very special friends.”

Excerpt from **Film Review 1991-2** profile of Macaulay Culkin:

“...Macaulay was paid \$1 million to co-star with Dan Aykroyd and Jamie Lee Curtis in **"MY GIRL"**, the story of a little girl growing up in her father’s funeral parlour. "I play this kid who lives next door," Mac informs us. "We bike ride and do stuff like that." He also gets his first screen kiss, with ten-year old new-

² *That’s correct, emotional attachments only become “real” when you have a bush of hair in the crotch, don’t they?*



In 1978 Brando caused a furore by demanding \$1m for his cameo in "SUPERMAN". A decade later, they were paying the same fee to a child star with just one hit to his credit. That's show business.

comer Anna Chlumsky. After that anything could happen. Imagine Films offered Culkin \$1.5 million to play a precocious *[sic]* ten-year old boy in "**COP AND A HALF**", opposite Kurt Russell's unorthodox cop – but the child star bowed out when an agreement failed to materialise..."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times reviews:

"Sugary 70s-set coming-of-age heartwarmer, starring Anna Chlumsky as a tomboyish 11-year old coping with life, death and first love amid the coffins of dad Dan Aykroyd's undertaker's business. This amiable, entertaining enough offering engineers the weirdest possible demise for co-star Macaulay Culkin – stung to death by a swarm of killer bees."

"Touching tale of a girl's father falling in love."

"Chlumsky plays the 11-year old daughter of a widowed mortician (Aykroyd) in this coming-of-age movie set in small-town USA. Her life grows ever more complex when her dad falls for hippie cosmetician (Curtis). Watch it for: Culkin's first screen kiss."

"Sentimental coming-of-age drama."

"Macaulay Culkin in a precocious romance *[sic – idiot!]*"

TV Times note:

"Macaulay Culkin and Anna Chlumsky experience the painful pleasures of growing up in the early Seventies. Dan Aykroyd and Jamie Lee Curtis are the adults. **"

The Sunday Times notes:

"Cosmetologist *[sic]* Jamie Lee Curtis transforms the lives of a young tomboy and her widower father."

"Mortician Dan Aykroyd falls for make-up girl Jamie Lee Curtis."

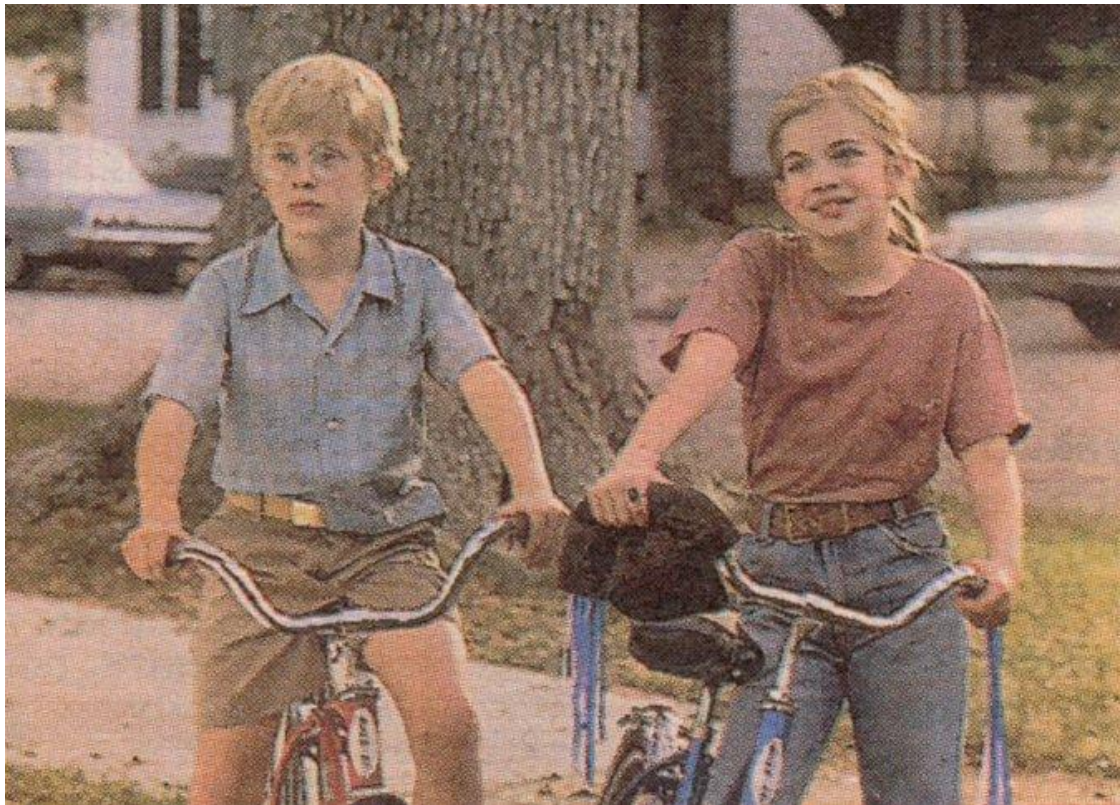
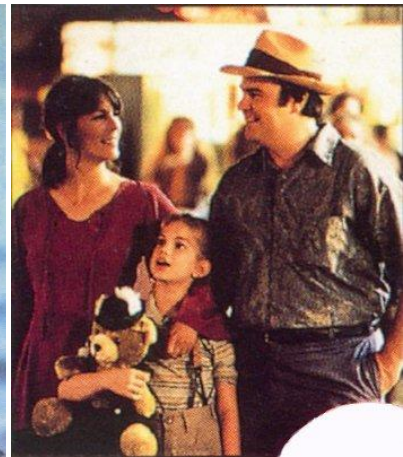
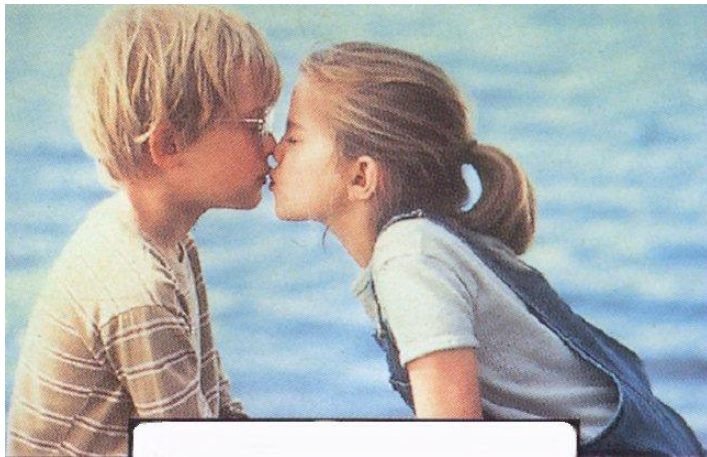
What's On TV note:

"Story about the pleasures and pains of growing up."

Source unknown:

"...Imagine Entertainment had no intention of running a similar risk with "**MY GIRL**", 11-year old Macaulay Culkin's first outing since 1990's "**HOME ALONE**". Essentially the story of young Anna Chlumsky overcoming her fear of death, the movie initially rejoiced in the slightly downbeat handle of "**BORN JAUNDICED**". "The reaction to that title was negative", admits "**MY GIRL**" creator Howard Zieff. "People thought it was about a yellow baby." And so it was that Imagine offered a \$500 prize to the employee who came up with the best alternative. "Because the girl's father owns a funeral parlour a lot of the suggestions had to do with death: 'Mourning Glory', 'In Lieu of Flowers', 'Dearly Departed'," says Zieff. The marginal entries included "Vada!", from the name of Chlumsky's character – rejected, Zieff asserts, "because it sounded like an uprising in South America" – and "...Woman", after the Helen Reddy anthem, before promoter and Motown fan Brian Grazer came up with "**MY GIRL**", presumably pocketing the 500 bucks himself. " '**MY GIRL**' sums up what the picture is about, said Zieff. And the Temptations song worked well in the film."

A good title, say insiders, is short – two or three words, maximum – easy to remember, *not* hard to pronounce (case in point: the box office disaster that was "**V.I. WARSHAWSKI**") and able to swiftly convey the film's central concept. Always mindful of the crossover appeal needed to take a picture into the blockbuster arena, producers rarely select a title aimed at only one segment of the audience..."



If the stills are any indication, Chlumsky looks sublimely self-confident in front of the camera. Source: indeterminate

See the children's TV documentary series "**The Lowdown**" for a profile of Anna Chlumsky at the time of this film. If she did anything else, beyond the inevitable sequel in 1994, I'm not aware of it. Competition in Hollywood is still intensely fierce for the few child roles worth having.

The cast is appealing – Aykroyd and Jamie Lee Curtis are both dependables with an edge of self-deprecating humour, while Griffin Dunne, under-rated as an actor, was usually an asset to a film. Also the 1970s – pre-Reagan, pre-Thatcher – seems a more endearing decade the more one contemplates the social changes that came after it. If the film is a sentimentalised portrait, there's no harm in that when the cinema shrinks from portraying contemporary life in sharp focus.

But, "cosmetologist"? Give me a break! And not a mention of Watergate? Vietnam? The oil crisis? It's rather like setting a film in the 1930s and ignoring the Depression. What seems distinctly 1990s is the emphasis on pre-pubescent courtship – we are all born heterosexuals, and spend the idle years before puberty rehearsing adult mating rituals, a theme constantly pumped out by film, television and family-targeted feature animations, as though homosexuality had reached epidemic levels and Western birth-rates were plummeting alarmingly. And what's all this preoccupation with Macaulay Culkin's "first screen kiss"? Wasn't it the dewy-eyed starlets – Temple, O'Brien, Franklin – whose first on-screen smooch was an occasion for celebration in the tabloids, usually around the age of 16? He's a ten-year old boy, for pity's sake, does anyone *care* who he's kissing?

The preoccupation with death, the paraphernalia surrounding it, and the suggestion Vada may be nursing a guilt complex over her mother's death, are more interesting elements in what's essentially a piece of nostalgic froth. How well the script respects its central character is impossible to say without viewing the film, but scant respect is shown for her in these reviews, littered with the usual dismissive qualifiers "precocious", "crush" etc etc. If the feelings of eleven-year olds are of so little consequence, what's the point in making this film?

It only remains to remark that the poster caption is self-evidently sexist – but belongs to that variant of *good* sexism (mocking males) which became a central feature of advertising over the 1990s, rather than *bad* sexism (objectifying females) which had long preceded it. It seems a self-contradiction that the film's bland title – worth five hundred dollars of any fool's money – displaces the central character of the story. If the film is about Vada, then surely "MY BOY" would have been more appropriate? Ah, but replacing the word "boy" with "girl" makes the *sound*, rather than the implied *meaning*, of the title prioritise the female. "MY BOY" *sounds* as though it's about a boy (which it isn't), "MY GIRL" *sounds* as though it's about a girl, even if the possessive pronoun is inaccurate. You don't think they chewed the fat on all this when they were agonising over a replacement for "BORN JAUNDICED"? You bet they did!

By the way, what happened to Culkin's glasses on the main poster image?

See the sequel "[MY GIRL 2](#)" (yawwwn) and subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL** and **DEATH / DYING CHILDREN**.