To a town with no future, comes a girl with a past.

THE SPITFIRE GRILL

AT THEATERS SOON
THE SPITFIRE GRILL

Cast:

- **Percy Talbott**: Alison Elliott (*Wyatt Earp, Living Dolls*)
- **Hannah Ferguson**: Ellen Burstyn (*Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*)
- **Shelby Goddard**: Marcia Gay Harden (*Mona Lisa Smile, Bad News Bears*)
- **Nahum Goddard**: Will Patton (*Remember the Titans, The Punisher*)
- **Joe Sperling**: Kieran Mulroney (*Quigley, Gettysburg*)
- **Sheriff Gary Walsh**: Gailard Sartain (*Elizabethtown, Ali, The Patriot*)
- **Johnny B./Eli**: John M. Jackson (*JAG, Roswell, A Perfect World*)
- **Effy Katshaw**: Louise De Cormier (*Ethan Fromme*)
- **Rebecca Goddard**: Ida Griesemer
- **Molly Goddard**: Lincoln Grow

Movie Facts:

- Written, directed, and produced by Lee David Zlotoff (*MacGyver, Remington Steele*)
- Musical score by James Horner (*Braveheart, Apollo 13, Titanic, Troy, Glory*)
- Inspiration for the 2001 Broadway Play by the same name
- Tagline: To a town with no future, comes a girl with a past
- Rating: PG-13 for thematic elements
- Runtime: 117 minutes
- Winner of the "Audience Award" at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival
- Winner of the 1997 Christopher Award
- Winner of the 1998 Australian Cinematographers Society Award of Distinction

Review:

"FOUR STARS – Powerful"
Reviewed by Cinema in Focus
A social and spiritual commentary by Hal Conklin and Denny Wayman

"The Spitfire Grill" is cinema at its finest. In this masterfully told tale, we travel a journey with people who could be our mother, sister, brother, son.

Their experiences are shared with such simple insight that we soon forget they are creations of fiction. Instead they become people woven into the fabric of our own experience.

The complexity of the themes of the film mirror the complexity of our lives. Life, death, sorrow, hope, discovery, loss, betrayal, loyalty, chance, confession, forgiveness, loneliness, and love are all genuinely presented.

The central character is a young woman whose life has guarded a grieving wound. Imprisoned for manslaughter, Perchance (Percy) Talbot has the dream of a new life: a life in which she can find a place safe enough to heal her wound.

Her choice is Gilead in the beautiful hills of Maine. Like the Biblical city of the same name which was known for its healing balm, Percy is seeking a
place with people who will love her and give her a chance to begin again.

Under the care of the local Sheriff responsible for her parole, she becomes the live-in waitress for Hannah (Ellen Burstyn). Hannah is the owner of the only restaurant in town called the “Spitfire Grill.”

This is the first step of her healing as she comes under a mother’s care. But what creates such depth in the film is that this also begins the healing of Hannah.

Like the Hannah of the Bible, who was barren and prayed for a son, and was given Samuel only to give him up again, Hannah of Gilead is also grieving a son.

Though the story is beautifully woven, it would ruin the intrigue and the unexpected turns of the tale to share the details of her wound. But her sorrow is touched as she begins to love Percy.

In their struggling and guarded attempts to love, we identify with them and feel their bond. In a wonderful statement of the reason why healing is so difficult, Percy asks Hannah a question as she puts a balm on her broken leg. She asks, “Do you suppose there are wounds which go so deep the healing of them hurts as much as the wounding?”

This strikes a chord in all of us. Intuitively we know that there are some things we experience which so injure our souls, that we cannot bear to even acknowledge the wound. To do so is far too painful. So we deny its existence, guarding it day and night against discovery, and wearying of its care.

But healing requires that we cease our denial and reopen the wound. The infection of wounds of the soul prematurely sealed over are toxic to the entire being of the person. Only love has the power to sustain the person during the healing of such wounds.

Following the Biblical symbolism, the story also has a judgmental presence in the nephew of Hannah, named Nahum. In the Bible, Nahum is the minor prophet whose book in the Old Testament is a judgment against the city of Nineveh. Nahum of old ends his message to the people by saying: “Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal…” (3:19)

Nahum of Gilead repeatedly proclaims a similar message to Hannah about Percy. He does not believe she can change and be healed.

But again, what creates the depth of this film is that even Nahum’s lack of faith in Percy to find healing eventually is used to bring about a humbling and a healing of his own arrogance and lack of love.

Symbolic of the people’s restlessness in the beginning of the film is that Gilead had one church which was closed due to economic reasons. The void felt in a town without a place to nourish their faith is powerfully corrected at the end of the film due to circumstances surrounding Percy’s life.

This new beginning for the town is emotionally reinforced in the closing scenes as the town joins together in its ministry to another hurting soul who comes with her son to find a new life.

The sorrows and wounds of our lives are deeply felt. The heart cries out for the chance to begin again and find healing for our souls.

The old hymn states it this way: “There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul. There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.” We experience that healing balm in the caring lives of people willing to open their hearts to others in need of a new chance to begin again.
Discussion Questions:

1. What did you think about the ending of this movie?
2. Was there any character in the movie you could relate to? Why?
3. How did the acting, screenwriting, and cinematography contribute to the effectiveness of this film?
4. Percy was looking for a new start, a new beginning for her life. Why did she choose Gilead? Have you ever wished you could go somewhere new to start your life over?
5. At its core this is a movie about redemption, both at the individual and the community level. To redeem something is to restore its honor, worth, value or reputation (for example, you botched the last job, but you can redeem yourself on this one). What redemption stories did you see in this movie?
6. Why was the hymn, There is a Balm in Gilead, chosen as the repetitious melody for this film? What does “Gilead” mean in biblical terms? Where did Percy learn the song? James Horner, who composed the soundtrack for Braveheart, Titanic and many other great movies, also composed the musical score for The Spitfire Grill. How did Horner’s music impact the movie?
7. Why is the book, The Odyssey, first seen in Percy’s cell, next in the kitchen as she reads, and finally skimmed by Hannah? What possible connection to the story could be implied by its presence?
8. Choose one of the following quotes and discuss why it is important to the story:
   Percy: “Most folks would rather hear a colorful lie over the truth any day.”
   Hannah: “Until I forget my name or start drooling at the mouth, I’ll thank you to let me make my own decisions.”
   Percy: “Wouldn’t it be better if the woman died too?” (The punch line to Percy’s story of the native canoe capsized by drunken men, where the baby sank to the river bed but there was no mention made of the squaw.)
   Percy: (describing Gilead for the newspaper ad) “You could say it’s got roots so deep, nobody can rip them out from under you.”
   Sheriff Walsh: Nahum ain’t that dog died yet?...she paid her debt, its all said and done.”
   Percy: “If the wound goes deep, can the healing of it hurt as much as what caused it?”
   Percy: “I knew there was no way God would forgive me for that.”
   Shelby: “Nahum, if you condemn that girl without proof, I’ll quit you for good.”
   Nahum: “I thought I knew Percy Talbot...a stranger...I never knew Percy Talbot...”
9. Do you think there is a little bit of Percy, Hannah, Shelby, Nahum and Eli in all of us? If so, how can Jesus Christ be our Gilead?
10. This was not a “religious” story or film, and apart from The Balm of Gilead song and the abandoned church, there wasn’t any direct reference to the Christian faith. And yet important Christian themes were communicated through out the movie such as new beginnings, confession, forgiveness, redemption, hope, change, judging others, good things come out of bad, and “bad people” being better than “good people”. Do you think this movie is an effective modern-day “parable” to communicate these important spiritual values and truths?

Join us next month
Saturday, February 11th at 7:00pm

SPIDER-MAN 2

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