

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Human being is a social creature. People need to interact with each other in order to maintain their lives because every single thing in someone's life sometimes has something to do with other people. It means that people depend on each other to fulfill their needs. The effect of those interactions is the rising of social problems. On the one hand, social problems can bring benefit to the society, but on the other hand it can also cause troubles. People do not need to avoid the problems because the most essential thing is about how their mind-set works in solving any problems or conflicts around them. They may even take advantages and learn some lessons from those problems. By dealing with their problem, they will eventually learn about the desire to achieve a better life.

From the explanation above, it is interesting to discuss the movie entitled *The Pursuit of Happiness*. It is based on a true story of Chris Gardner, a respected millionaire, the owner and CEO of Christopher Gardner International Holdings in America. The "happiness" people will have noted is misspelled by using "Y" instead of an "I". The reason why Gardner uses the misspelled word is because it comes from the name of a daycare center in the movie where Gardner places his son during his difficult situation. The owner of the daycare does not know that "happiness" is written with an "I" because she is a Chinese-American woman who does not understand English well. The word also means a lot for Gardner as a

form of step up and respects the daycare for caring his son. The reason why the writer is really interested in discussing this movie is because *The Pursuit of Happyness* exposes various conflicts. It is based on a real rags-to-riches story and also the picture of the American dream. It is about the value of struggle for survival when someone has no one to depend on but himself and how the condition influences someone's effort and decision to give meaning to his life.

The Pursuit of Happyness is an Academy Award-nominated 2006 drama film produced by Overbrook Entertainment, Escape Artist, and Relativity Media, in association with and released by Columbia Pictures on December 15, 2006 <www.chrisgardnermedia.com>. However, the movie differs from Gardner's real-life experiences in various aspects. The movie emphasizes the story on Gardner's problems during his life with his wife and son, while in real life; Gardner has faced many problems since he was a little boy. Gardner was not always successful. Back in early 1980s, Gardner was a single father who had to take care of his five-year-old son and face so many problems in his life: abusement, no income, homelessness, unpaid taxes, jail and many more. His one and only dream is to have a better life to hold on to, particularly for his son.

The film was directed by Gabriele Muccino, an Italian director making his English language directorial debut. One of Muccino's movies, *The Last Kiss*, had won Sundance's Audience Award when it premiered there in 2002, and his follow-up, *Remember Me, My Love* with Monica Bellucci, was admired by film critics around the world < www.rottentomatoes.com >.

The Pursuit of Happyness stars Will Smith as Chris Gardner and Smith's real-life son Jaden Smith as Gardner's son, Christopher. While Thandie Newton, the Oscar-winning Best Picture in her movie *Crash*, was chosen to play Linda as Gardner's wife. Despite giving his blessing to Escape Artists to develop a movie inspired by his struggles, Gardner is initially wary of the license needed to be taken to turn these events into a story for the screen.

According to Blumenthal and the producers, it is really important to them to meet Gardner so they could reassure him that, no matter what changes they made for dramatic purposes, they would fight passionately to preserve the integrity of how he had lived, and continues to live, his life. While the movie was being made, Gardner decided to write his own version of his story in the non-fiction book *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which was released earlier <www.rottentomatoes.com>. The differences between the real story and the movie is not too significant, there are only minor changes as they only differ in some details that will give a dramatic effect for the movie.

The Pursuit of Happyness tells about the bitterness of Gardner's journey in pursuing a better life. Chris Gardner is a family man struggling to make ends of financial problem in his family. Despite his courageous attempts to help keep the family afloat, the mother of his five-year-old son Christopher is buckling under the constant strain of financial pressure. No longer able to handle, she reluctantly decides to leave. Gardner, then becomes a single father, continues determinedly to pursue a better-paying job using every sales skill he knows. He lands an internship at a prestigious stock brokerage firm, and although there is no salary, he accepts,

hopeful he will end the program with a job and a promising future. Without a financial lessen, Gardner and his son are soon expelled from their apartment and forced to sleep in shelters, bus stations, bathrooms, or wherever they can find refuge for the night. Despite his troubles, Gardner continues to honor his commitment as a loving and caring father, using the affection and trust his son has placed in him as a force to overcome the obstacles he faces.

Newton, who plays the role of Gardner's wife, Linda, has her own take on the story. She said that she is incredibly moved by the strength of this father's love — not just for his son — but also his belief and love for himself. He does not want to abandon his son in the way that he has been abandoned as a child. She added that it is such a story of optimism and hope, despite the really tough spot that they find themselves in.

Will Smith himself, perceives this movie as the embodiment of the American Dream. Smith stated that the concept of the country is based on the hope that any person, armed with their will and determination, can create their life, can create their situation — from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high. Any time people see someone who displays that kind of greatness and diligence, the natural question they ask themselves is — would I have been able to do that? Would I have been man enough, father enough, husband enough to stand up and face the adversity the way that person did — the way that Chris Gardner did? These were all questions Smith asked himself <www.rottentomatoes.com>.

The audience distinguishes the movie in both pro and contra opinions as well. In one hand, some people perceive the movie as Smith's sensational work.

They think that Smith does a fantastic job in bringing the real Chris Gardner's soul into this movie and they agree that this movie brings the point of what people called inspiring. On the other hand, the other audiences believe that 'happiness' in this movie is only a matter of phrase. The most remarkable point that can be distinguished obviously is the financial matter and the pursuit of money.

At the end, the writer is really inspired by Gardner's struggle and love to his son because this movie helps the writer learn about relationships and love between Gardner and his son. The writer is incredibly moved by the idea of this movie about what people would do if they ever loved someone enough that they would be willing to do anything. It relates to Chris Gardner, who literally will do anything to protect his child.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

Due to the described background above, the writer would like to formulate the statement of the problems as follows:

- 1.2.1. How does Gardner's background and condition affect his behavior in dealing with the conflicts in his life?
- 1.2.2. How does Gardner's behavior and condition portray the American basic values and the American Dream?

1.3. Objective of the Study

Regarding the statement of the problems above, the writer would arrange the objective of the study as follows:

- 1.3.1. To describe Gardner's role as a single father considering the way he educate and take care of his son based on his childhood experience and describe how the problems that Gardner faced in his life help develop his character.
- 1.3.2. To describe the way Gardner's behavior and condition portray the American basic values and American dream.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The aim of this thesis is to inform the readers about the precious meaning behind *The Pursuit of Happiness* movie. This is such a great story of hope and optimism. The writer hopes that the readers can learn the way Gardner struggles against all the obstacles in his life. No matter what happens in his life, Gardner always believes in his own ability and never gives up. Beside that, it is essential to acknowledge the readers that the power of basic values that emerged since the late 1700s in America are still adhering in every American's character.

By emphasizing the analysis on Gardner's behavior and his conflicts in describing the theme of the movie, hopefully, this thesis can help the readers to gain a deeper understanding about the power of American basic values toward someone's mindset. The writer wishes that this thesis can give some contribution in broadening the knowledge of the readers especially those who have a great interest in American life.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

In writing the thesis, the writer would like to limit her analysis by analyzing the study of character, particularly Chris Gardner as the main character in this movie. Yet, in some sections, the writer will also analyze other characters to support her analysis on Gardner's behavior. The writer will also analyze the conflicts within the family along with Gardner's efforts in reaching his ideal, which has evoked several arguments and suspicions among the family members. Above all, by understanding the characters and the conflicts in this movie, the writer will be able to analyze the theme of the movie which is clearly illustrated through Gardner's behavior and all of his conflicts in this movie.

Beside that, the writer will insert some information on the background of the real Chris Gardner. The purpose of giving the information is not to differentiate between the real stories of Chris Gardner with the story in the movie, but it is more to give a clearer picture of his background that only appears in the movie for a moment as a narration. This background is considered important because it influences the behavior of Gardner in the movie.

1.6. Theoretical Background

The writer is going to apply the intrinsic approach by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, and Richard Gill to analyze the movie. The purpose of the approach is to analyze the elements which consist of plot, setting, character, characterization and theme. Nevertheless, the writer will focus on Gardner's character and use the analysis of the conflict and theme of this movie. After that,

the writer will also apply some theories of American studies to gain a clearer picture of American basic values and American dream as the theme of this movie.

In applying the theory, in order to get a deeper analysis, the writer will not merely use a single concept from one theorist, but she will use several concepts from some theorists to elaborate the analysis of the movie.

1.7. Method of the Study

In writing this thesis, the writer will apply two basic techniques which are: data collecting and data analysis. Data collecting is obtained from library researches in which the writer gains information from various sources such as: literary books, essays, critics, dictionaries, encyclopedia and online library. Some relevant theoretical books are used to support the understanding about literary theories which are used as the basis of analyzing the movie. Then, the writer also includes the Chris Gardner's biography that has the same title with the movie *The Pursuit of Happiness* to support the writer's knowledge about the background of this movie which is inspired by Gardner's true story.

Nevertheless, the main source of this study is, of course, the movie and the script itself. The writer also browses many on-line sources to find additional information that can be used to support the discussion on the main idea. After collecting and identifying the qualitative data, then the writer will apply the theory to analyze the data.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms

- *Struggle*: Gardner's behavior in *The Pursuit of Happiness* is portrayed as someone who never gives up in living his terrible life. No matter how hard troubles have broken his life, he always believes in his own ability on building a good future for his family. Gardner's effort and motivation in this movie have made the essence of the real meaning of struggle becomes very crucial.
- *American basic values*: Values are ideas about what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, normal and abnormal, proper and improper. American basic values are beliefs and assumptions that commonly held by Americans.
- *American dream*: United States appeared to be a land of plenty where millions people could come to seek their fortunes. They definitely did not "get rich overnight", but they suffered terribly. However, the majority of them will eventually able to improve upon their former standard of living. The phrase "going from rags to riches" became a slogan for the "American dream".
- *The pursuit of happiness*: American dream was originally about discovery, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness. The pursuit of happiness represents the American basic values of life.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW