

“Downsizing”

By Helen Lutz

Some of the best stories are old stories. I don't know how many times I've read the adventure book "Gulliver's Travels." More than 200 years after being written by Jonathan Swift, I still find the story fascinating as does Hollywood. The giant portion of the story isn't as interesting as Lemuel Gulliver's interaction with the "little people." Movies about little people and shrinking people have been around a long time, such as "Fantastic Voyage," "Innerspace" and "Honey I Shrank the Kids." Director Alexander Payne introduces us to another new idea about shrinking people in his new movie "Downsizing."



Scientists in Norway have determined that the greatest threat to mankind is overpopulation. There are just so many resources to go around. A team led by Dr. Jorgen Asbjornsen (Rolf Laasgard) discovers a brilliant solution to the problem – downsizing. They are safely able to shrink life forms to .0364 percent of their original body mass; an irreversible five inches tall. Take a minute to imagine how remarkable it would be to require only a fraction of the water, food, gas, electricity, etc. while reducing man's carbon footprint on the environment. Tons of people could fit inside a jet leaving plenty of leg room. Beautiful in concept but it does have a couple of drawbacks, "if it seems that something is too good to be true, it probably is."

Ten years after the process of downsizing has been perfected, Paul and Audrey Safranek (played by Matt Damon and Kristen Wiig) walk into the bank trying to refinance their home, a home that has been in Paul's family since childhood. They are disappointed to learn that their income ratio doesn't qualify for the assistance. While at a class reunion, Paul and Audrey meet an old classmate Dave (a five inch Jason Sudekis) and his wife who rave about the benefits of downsizing. One single dollar multiplies many times over when one downsizes.

Cash-strapped Paul and Audrey decide to look into one of the 'small' communities, Leisure Land. Their paltry net worth of \$150K translates into well over \$12 million dollars. They could live a life of luxury. They watch fun sales pitches performed by Neil Patrick Harris and Laura Dern relaxing in her bubble filled garden tub talking about the extremely low cost of diamond jewelry and mansions, SOLD! Paul and Audrey decide to take the plunge.

With gender specific separation for the procedure Paul goes first. It's amazing to watch as all hair is removed, dental work done – a stray filling will cause your head to explode, and once the procedure is complete, workers go down the line of gurneys carefully scraping up each person with a kitchen spatula. Up until this point, the story has been fun and fascinating. However, not all goes well for Paul and I'm not going to spoil the plot.

The story proves the point that if it seems that something is too good to be true, it probably is, especially for Paul. He winds up working as a janitor for a cleaning company owned by Vietnamese dissident Ngoc Lan Tran (Hong Chau) who was forcibly downsized by her government and survived a harrowing escape to America inside a television box. Hong Chau is the brightest spot in the film with her directness and broken English. Payne shows us that even in a perfect world; life can be far from perfect. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats ... I give "Downsizing" TWO AND 1/2 HARTS. A remarkable concept takes us on an interesting journey but unfortunately turns political and preachy.