

A Christmas Story

(COLOR)

Ghost of Christmas Past.

Hollywood, Nov. 12.

An MGM/UA release. Produced by Rene Dupont and Bob Clark. Directed by Bob Clark. Features entire cast. Screenplay, Jean Shepherd, Leigh Brown, Bob Clark, adapted from novel, "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash" by Jean Shepherd; camera (Medallion color), Reginald H. Morris; editor, Stan Cole; music, Carl Zittler, Paul Zaza; production designer, Reuben Freed; art director, Gavin Mitchell; set decorator, Mark Freeborn; costume designer, Mary E. McLeod; sound mixer, Alan Bernard; associate producer, Gary Goch; assistant director, Ken Goch. Reviewed at MGM/UA studio, Los Angeles, Nov. 11, 1983. (MPAA rating: PG.) Running time: 94 MINS.

Mother	Melinda Dillon
The Old Man	Darren McGavin
Ralphie	Peter Billingsley
Randy	Ian Petrella
Flick	Scott Schwartz
Schwartz	R.D. Robb
Miss Shields	Tedde Moore
Scot Farcus	Zack Ward

For those who want to get their Christmas off to an early, idealized start before the real thing sets in, "A Christmas Story" should fit the bill nicely. Based on Jean Shepherd story, "A Christmas Story" is a version of Christmas as it exists only in the imagination. Though it is told through the eyes of a child, adults should find more to respond to in this nostalgic look at growing up in the '40s.

In his radio program, novels and PBS shows, Shepherd has always been best at evoking the texture of life as it used to be in his midwest childhood. It was a time of innocence and charm "when all was right with the world." "A Christmas Story" is true to that spirit without being cloyingly sentimental or phoney.

The film works almost as an illustrated monolog complete with narration by Shepherd. A bunch of vignettes about family life and small-town Americana in the mid-'40s are tied together around a rather flimsy plot device.

What Ralphie (Peter Billingsley) wants for Christmas more than anything in the whole world is a Red Ryder "range model air rifle." There seems to be a conspiracy against him getting one, however. While mother and teacher warn him that he'll only poke his eye out, visions of the Red Ryder dance in his head.

As Ralphie pines for something he has no power to do anything about, his life becomes vividly alive thanks to numerous well observed details. His younger brother Randy (Ian Petrella), for instance, hasn't eaten willingly in three years and his father (Darren McGavin) leaves a "stream of obscenities over Lake Michigan" as he waits to become a major winner in a crossword contest.

Director Bob Clark ("Porky's") and production designer Reuben Freed have lovingly recreated the look and feel of an era populated by Little Orphan Annie decoder rings, Ovaltine, and overloaded electrical outlets. Performances by McGavin, Melinda Dillon as the mother and especially the kids, bullies and classmates included, adds to a genuine feeling of family warmth.

With his hornrimmed glasses and voice-over narration by Shepherd, Ralphie seems more like a grown-up than a nine-year-old. "A Christmas Story" is an adult's view of childhood kids may find corny. — *Jaar*.