

## Staying Together ★★

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**Year of Release:** 1989

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** USA

**Verdict:** Skip It

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*Staying Together* reminds me of another small-town-slice-of-life movie: *Mystic Pizza*. *Staying Together* is sort of the flip side of that far superior film: instead of depicting three young women and their boyfriends, *Staying Together* follows three young men and their girlfriends. The movie also mixes in a strong dose of father-son conflict to stir things up. Dramatically, *Staying Together* is a mess, but thankfully it partially redeems itself with its off-beat humor.

The movie is set in Ridgeway, South Carolina, where three brothers help their father run the family restaurant, McDermott's Famous Chicken. The early portion of the film captures the charm and flavor of the town's leisurely life-style. The brothers lounge around, get drunk, work a little, smoke some pot, and generally goof off. Life is easy and simple. That is, until their father turns their lives upside down by abruptly selling the family business.

*Staying Together* suffers from a wildly inconsistent and sometimes incoherent script by playwright Monte Merrick. Merrick definitely has a knack for creating comic situations. For example, in one scene, the oldest brother, played by Tim Quill, makes love to Stockard Channing while she

is on the phone. Somehow, the movie manages to squeeze laughs out of this tired gag.

Unfortunately, *Staying Together* falls apart whenever it shifts gears from comedy to drama. The film really lays an egg during the "Big Emotional Moments," which come fast and furious. After the uptight father suffers a heart attack, every twist and turn in the story seems to bring about an emotional crisis. None of these scenes rings true because the characters sound like they are delivering speeches rather than speaking naturally. The supposedly touching moments have all the emotional impact of a calculus lecture.

Neither director Lee Grant nor the cast is really to blame; the weak script is just too much for them to overcome. As far as the performances go, the real bright spot is Sean Astin, who plays the youngest brother—a rambunctious 17-year-old. Astin steals every scene he's in with his flamboyant charisma. Melinda Dillon also stands out as the hip housewife and mother.

For a movie that leaves you so cold emotionally, *Staying Together* provides more entertainment than you might expect, but whether it's worth the price of a movie ticket plus parking is another matter altogether.