Philadelphia, the Prequel?

How Forrest Gump became an AIDS movie

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“Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re going to get.” So begins the saga of Forrest Gump, played by Tom Hanks in the megahit film. Well, AIDS may have been one of those things *Forrest Gump* was talking about. Without giving the ending away, suffice it to say that someone dies after explaining that she has a virus the doctors don’t know anything about. The year is 1982 and the word AIDS isn’t used. A spokesman for the studio, Paramount, said the virus was obviously HIV but declined to speculate further. Paramount also wouldn’t elaborate on the idea that since Forrest Gump had unprotected sex resulting in a son with this woman, doesn’t that mean that Gump and his son are also at risk for AIDS?

Could the hero of this movie evolve into an AIDS activist? The producers apparently did not understand what a can of worms they have opened. No comment from *Gump* producers, and Paramount publicists insist the only reason they won’t talk is that they say (*surprise!*) that they don’t want to ruin the film’s ending for anyone.

In other movie news, a cop mystery thriller is being prepared from a script that features a psycho who kills his male lover when he finds out his lover’s HIV positive. The independent, low-budget flick, *The Forget-Me-Knot*, starring John Malkovich and Alexis Arquette, sounds truly scary. Relax, say the producers. “The character [who commits murder] is madly in love with the infected partner,” says producer John Flock. “Malkovich’s character is angry because his lover hasn’t told him his positive, not because he’s positive. It’s also a minor plot point, not the focus of the movie,” he says. Since when is murder a minor plot point?

What happens when a man returns home to the Midwest with AIDS? A film based on a real person and a Minnesota town is tentatively called *Back Home*. The project is being produced by Doug Chapin and Barry Krost (their most recent credit is the Tina Turner biopic *What’s Love Got To Do With It*) for Disney’s Touchstone Pictures. Yes, Disney is doing AIDS, but with executives who aren’t planning to sugar-coat what Chapin calls “the volatile vehicle for the reality of death” that is AIDS.

Late in June, Chapin lost his lover to AIDS. Still, he promises *Home* won’t be “a righteous victim movie where, gee, he suffers and we all feel bad.” Instead, it will reflect life. “I know a lot of people who have turned HIV into a positive journey and have had very constructive experiences in their

lives. When that happens, it is one of the most moving things to be around."

AIDS is a courageous journey, Chapin says, which is exactly what's in store for all of us as *Back Home* heads for the silver screen later this year.

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