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Cinema Therapy

Watch. Listen. Find your inner child. Rewind.

In 2002, Moraga resident Birgit Wolz found a good formula for a group therapy approach: Watch movies and talk about how they make you feel.

“I had led therapy groups and I love movies, so I thought, why not put the two together?” says the German-born psychotherapist. As easy as that might sound, the intention of Wolz’s Cinema Alchemy Group is not for film lovers to convene and wax poetic about the wonders of cinema.

“This is not a book club,” Wolz emphasizes. “It’s a group therapy session for people who have an interest in film, but also in personal growth.”

Her group first met in September 2002 to discuss the Gwyneth Paltrow drama *Sliding Doors*. “It has a lot of relationship issues and questions of opening yourself up and being available to intimacy,” says Wolz. After that came *Groundhog Day* (“Everyone who comes to therapy feels stuck in some way. The movie showed how to get out of the patterns you don’t want to repeat in your life”) and *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* (“which deals with codependency issues and eating disorders”).

A group of six adults is assigned to watch each film at home. The group then meets every Wednesday in Oakland to dissect the feelings they had while watching each film, then dig deeper into their experiences. “Talking about the experiences of the characters in the film is a catalyst for people to talk about their own lives,” says Wolz. “A film can be like a window to our subconscious, like a dream. The synergistic effect of music and images and story, they can help us bypass our defenses.”

The next series of Cinema Alchemy Group begins in early September; go to www.cinematherapy.com for more information. Wolz’s new book, *E-Motion Picture Magic: A Movie Lover’s Guide to Healing and Transformation*, hits bookstores this month.

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