

The Straight Story

The Straight Story (stylised as the Straight story) is a 1999 biographical road drama film directed by David Lynch. It was edited and produced by Mary Sweeney, Lynch's longtime partner and collaborator, who also co-wrote the script with John E. Roach. It is based on the true story of Alvin Straight's 1994 journey across Iowa and Wisconsin on a lawn mower.

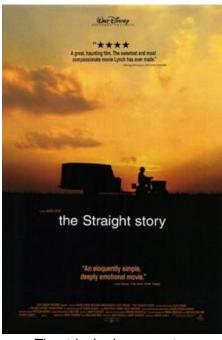
Alvin (Richard Farnsworth) is an elderly World War II veteran who lives with his daughter. When he hears that his estranged brother has suffered a stroke, Alvin makes up his mind to visit him and hopefully make amends before he dies. Because Alvin's legs and eyes are too impaired for him to receive a driver's license, he hitches a trailer to his recently purchased thirty-year-old John Deere 110 Lawn Tractor, which has a maximum speed of about 5 miles per hour (2.2 m/s; 8.0 km/h), and sets off on the 240-mile (390 km) journey from Laurens, Iowa, to Mount Zion, Wisconsin.

The Straight Story was released by Walt Disney Pictures [4] in the United States. The film grossed \$6.2 million in a limited theatrical release in the United States and sold 516,597 tickets nationwide during France's theatrical release. The film was a critical success, [6] reviewers praised the intensity of the character performances, particularly the realistic dialogue which film critic Roger Ebert compared to the works of Ernest Hemingway. The received a nomination for the Palme d'Or at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival and Farnsworth received a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actor, becoming the oldest nominee in the category at the time.

Plot

In <u>Laurens</u>, <u>Iowa</u>, Alvin Straight fails to show up to his regular bar meeting with friends and is eventually found lying on his kitchen floor. His daughter, Rose, takes her reluctant father to see a doctor, who sternly admonishes Alvin to give up tobacco and use a <u>walker</u>; Alvin refuses and instead opts to use two canes. Shortly after, Alvin learns that his brother, Lyle, has suffered a stroke. Longing to visit him, but unable to drive, Alvin develops a plan to travel 240 miles to <u>Mount Zion</u>, Wisconsin on his riding

The Straight Story



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	David Lynch
Written by	John Roach
	Mary Sweeney
Produced by	Mary Sweeney
	Neal Edelstein
	Alain Sarde

Starring	Richard Farnsworth	
	Sissy Spacek	
	Harry Dean Stanton	

Cinematography Freddie Francis

Edited by	Mary Sweeney
Music by	Angelo Badalamenti
Production companies	Asymmetrical Productions
	Canal+
	FilmFour
	Ciby 2000
	Le Studio Canal+

Distributed by

Buena Vista Pictures

Distribution^[a] (United

lawnmower, towing a small homemade travel-trailer along the way. This stirs doubt and worry in the minds of his family, friends, and neighbors.

Alvin's first attempt fails: after experiencing difficulty starting the old mower's motor, he does not get far before the machine breaks down. Alvin arranges for his mower to be transported back home on a flatbed truck, where he later shoots it with a shotgun out of frustration. At the <u>John Deere</u> dealership, he purchases a used 1966 JD 110 lawn tractor.

On the side of the highway, Alvin passes a young female hitchhiker who later approaches his campfire. In conversation, Alvin deduces that she is pregnant and has run away from home. Alvin tells her about the importance of family by describing a bundle of sticks that is hard to break compared to a single stick. The next day, Alvin emerges from the trailer to find that she has left him a bundle of sticks tied together. Later, a huge group of RAGBRAI cyclists raced past him. He arrives at the cyclists' camp and is greeted with applause. That night, he speaks with a pair of friendly cyclists around the campfire about growing old.

States) FilmFour Distributors (United Kingdom) BAC Films (France) **Release dates** May 21, 1999 (Cannes) October 15, 1999 (United States) **Running time** 112 minutes Countries **United States** United Kingdom France Language **English** \$10 million^[2] **Budget Box office** \$6.2 million (United States)[3]

The next day, Alvin encounters a distraught woman who has just hit a deer in front of him. She drives away after a tearful rant, and Alvin cooks and eats the deer, mounting the antlers on his trailer as a tribute to the deer and the sustenance it provided. Alvin's brakes fail as he travels down a steep hill; after an intense speedy descent, he manages to stop. A man named Danny helps Alvin get his tractor and trailer off the main road, discovering that the mower has transmission problems. Danny invites Alvin to camp in his backyard until his tractor is repaired.

Now beginning to run low on cash, Alvin calls Rose to ask her to send him his <u>Social Security</u> check. Danny offers Alvin a ride the rest of the way to Lyle's, but Alvin declines, stating that he prefers to travel his own way. Verlyn, an elderly war veteran, takes Alvin into town for a drink. As Alvin does not drink alcohol, he orders a glass of milk, and the two men exchange traumatic stories about their experiences in World War II.

Alvin's tractor is fixed, and he is presented with an exorbitant bill by the mechanics, who are twins and are constantly bickering. Alvin successfully negotiates the price down and explains his mission to help his brother. Alvin crosses the Mississippi River and makes camp in a cemetery. He chats with a Catholic priest who recognizes Lyle's name and is aware of his stroke. The priest says that Lyle did not mention he had a brother. Alvin responds that all he wants is to make peace with Lyle after their falling out ten years prior.

Finally arriving in Mount Zion, Alvin stops at a bar to ask for directions to Lyle's house and to have a beer: his first drink in years. Alvin experiences engine trouble just a few miles from Lyle's house and stops in the middle of the road. A tractor driver stops to help, then leads the way to Lyle's house. When he arrives, Alvin finds the house dilapidated. He calls for his brother, who appears to be using a walker and invites Alvin to sit down on the porch. Lyle asks if Alvin had ridden the lawnmower all the way just to see him, to which Alvin simply responds, "I did, Lyle." The two men sit together silently and gaze up at the stars.

Cast

- Richard Farnsworth as Alvin Straight
- Sissy Spacek as Rose Straight

- Harry Dean Stanton as Lyle Straight
- Everett McGill as Tom
- John Farley as Thorvald Olsen
- Kevin Farley as Harald Olsen
- Jane Galloway Heitz as Dorothy
- Joseph Carpenter as Bud
- Donald Wiegert as Sig
- Ed Grennan as Pete
- Jack Walsh as Apple
- James Cada as Danny Riordan
- Wiley Harker as Verlyn Heller
- Anastasia Webb as Crystal (the hitchhiking runaway)
- Barbara Robertson as Deer woman
- John Lordan as Priest
- Dan Flannery as Doctor Gibbons
- Max the Wonder Dog as Farm Dog^[8]

Production

Development

In 1994, 73-year-old <u>Alvin Straight</u> rode a lawnmower across 300 miles of the American Midwest to visit his ailing brother. Mary Sweeney, David Lynch's frequent collaborator, read about Straight's story in <u>The New York Times</u> that summer. Said Sweeney, "Growing up in <u>Wisconsin</u>, I easily connected with that kind of stoic, non-verbal, stubborn, idiosyncratic American character. I get how hard it is to have quiet pride and dignity when you're old and poor and are living in the middle of nowhere. I understand what these people's dreams and frustrations are. And I loved how much his journey captured the national imagination, so, wearing my producer's hat, I started trying to secure the rights." [9]

Producer Ray Stark had already acquired the rights to Straight's story and envisioned the project as a potential star vehicle for Paul Newman. [9] Straight died in 1996, and the rights to his story became available again. Sweeney co-wrote the script with John Roach, a childhood friend; the two retraced Straight's route in the process of writing. [9] When Lynch saw the finished script he immediately took to it, saying "it became, for me, very real." [9]

Casting

For the role of Alvin Straight, producers cast their first choice, <u>Richard Farnsworth</u>. [9] Though he was reluctant to commit to the role as he was then terminally ill with metastatic prostate cancer, he took the role out of admiration for Straight. Sissy Spacek, a longtime friend of Lynch's who had helped to finance his earlier film *Eraserhead*, was cast as Alvin's daughter, Rose. [9] Harry Dean Stanton was cast as Alvin's ailing brother. [9]

Filming

The Straight Story was independently shot along the actual route taken by Straight, and all scenes were shot in chronological order in the autumn of 1998. [12] Lynch would later call the film "my most experimental movie". [13]

During production, Farnsworth's cancer had spread to his bones, but he astonished his co-workers with his tenacity during production. The paralysis of his legs as shown in the film was real. [14] Farnsworth died by suicide on October 6, 2000, at the age of 80. [15]

The Straight Story was acquired by Walt Disney Pictures in the United States after a successful debut at Cannes and was given a G rating by the MPAA (the only Lynch film to receive such a rating). It was Peter Schneider, Disney's president of production at the time, that got the idea to have the studio acquire the film after seeing it at Cannes, calling it "a beautiful movie about values, forgiveness and healing and celebrates America. As soon as I saw it, I knew it was a Walt Disney film." October Films also negotiated for the rights, but a deal never materialized. 1

Music

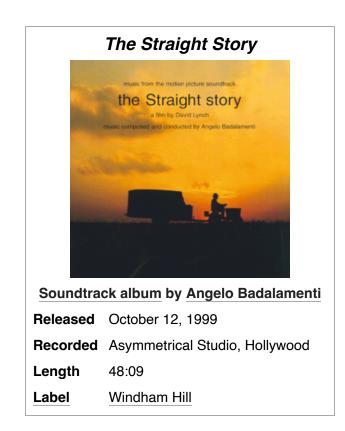
The <u>musical score</u> for *The Straight Story* was composed by <u>Angelo Badalamenti</u>, continuing a 13-plus year collaboration with Lynch that began with <u>Blue Velvet</u>. [17] A soundtrack album was released on October 12, 1999, by Windham Hill Records. [18]

Soundtrack

All music composed and conducted by Angelo Badalamenti.

The Straight Story: Music from the Motion Picture Soundtrack

e Molion Picture Soundtrack			
No.	Title	Length	
1.	"Laurens, lowa"	2:45	
2.	"Rose's Theme"	2:55	
3.	"Laurens Walking"	4:11	
4.	"Sprinkler"	2:56	
5.	"Alvin's Theme"	4:25	
6.	"Final Miles"	4:06	
7.	"Country Waltz"	2:46	
8.	"Rose's Theme"	3:07	
9.	"Country Theme"	3:38	
10.	"Crystal"	4:07	
11.	"Nostalgia"	6:51	
12.	"Farmland Tour"	3:09	
13.	"Montage"	7:24	
	Total length:	48:09	



Professional ratings

D			
Review scores			
Source	Rating		
AllMusic	**** <u>[19]</u>		
Q	***** <u>[20]</u>		
Uncut	**** <mark>[21]</mark>		

Home media

The Straight Story was released on DVD on November 7, 2000. [22] As with many of Lynch's films, there are no chapter markers on the original North American DVD release, with a note written by Lynch inside the DVD case that reads, "It is my opinion that a film is not a book - it should not be broken up. It is a continuum and should be seen as such." [23]

On September 17, 2021, *The Straight Story* received a limited edition Blu-ray release from Imprint Films. [24]

Reception

Critical reception

The Straight Story was critically acclaimed upon its release, with critics lauding Lynch's uncharacteristic subject matter. Entertainment Weekly described the film as a "celestial piece of Americana". The Chicago Tribune wrote of the film, "we see something American studio movies usually don't give us: the simple, unsentimentalized beauty of the rural American Midwestern landscape." [26]

Janet Maslin of <u>The New York Times</u> wrote, "the same bellwether quality that left <u>Blue Velvet</u> looking so prescient, and ushered in a whole cinematic wave of taboo-shattering, is at work once again. When a born unnaturalist like Lynch can bring such interest and emotion to one man's simple story, the realm of the ordinary starts looking like a new frontier." Of Farnsworth's performance, Maslin wrote, "he automatically frees the film from any sense of artifice and delivers an amazingly stalwart performance that will not soon be forgotten." Her review concluded, "The Straight Story is...about gazing at the sky, about experiencing each encounter to the fullest, than it is about getting anywhere in a hurry. It's been too long since a great American movie dared to regard life that way." [27]

Roger Ebert gave the film four out of four stars, the first positive review he had given to a film by Lynch. He wrote: "The first time I saw *The Straight Story* I focused on the foreground and liked it. The second time I focused on the background, too, and loved it. The movie isn't just about the old Alvin Straight's odyssey through the sleepy towns and rural districts of the Midwest, but about the people he finds to listen and care for him." [7]

On review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, the film has an approval rating of 95% based on 106 reviews, with an average rating of 8.2/10. The website's critical consensus reads, "With strong performances and director David Lynch at the helm, *The Straight Story* steers past sentimental byways on its ambling journey across the American heartland." On Metacritic, the film has a score of 86 out of 100, based on 32 critics, indicating "universal acclaim". AllMovie wrote, "David Lynch offers an uncharacteristically straightforward and warmly sentimental approach to his material in this film", calling it "one of his best films". [29][30]

Awards and honors

The Straight Story was nominated for the Palme d'Or at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival. [31] Richard Farnsworth earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor for his portrayal of Alvin Straight. [32][33] For 21 years he held the record as the oldest person (at 79) to be nominated for a Best Actor Oscar. Farnsworth also won the 1999 New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Actor for his performance in the film. [34]

List of awards and nominations received by The Straight Story

Award	Category	Nominee(s)	Result	Ref.
Academy Awards	Best Actor	Richard Farnsworth	Nominated	[35]
Bodil Awards	Best American Film	David Lynch	Won	[36]
British Independent Film Awards	Best International Independent Film - English Language		Won	[37]
Cahiers du Cinéma	Annual Top 10 Lists		8th place	[38]
Camerimage	Golden Frog	Freddie Francis	Nominated	[39]
1999 Cannes Film Festival	Palme d'Or	David Lynch	Nominated	[31]
	Best Picture		Nominated	
Chicago Film Critics Association Awards	Best Actor	Richard Farnsworth	Nominated	[40]
7.Warac	Best Director	5	Nominated	-
European Film Awards	Screen International Award	David Lynch	Won	[41]
Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival	Jury Award for Best Actor	Richard Farnsworth	Won	[42]
Coldon Cloba Awarda	Best Actor - Motion Picture Drama		Nominated	[43]
Golden Globe Awards	Best Original Score - Motion Picture	Angelo Badalamenti	Nominated	[43]
Guldbagge Awards	Best Foreign Film		Nominated	[44]
Humanitas Prize	Feature Film Category	John Roach, <u>Mary</u> Sweeney	Nominated	[45]
	Best Male Lead	Richard Farnsworth	Won	[46]
	Best Feature	John Roach, Mary Sweeney	Nominated	
Independent Spirit Awards	Best Director	David Lynch	Nominated	
	Best First Screenplay	John Roach, Mary Sweeney	Nominated	
Los Angeles Film Critics Association Awards	Best Actor	Richard Farnsworth	2nd place	[47]
National Board of Review Awards 1999	Top Ten Films		Won	[48]
National Society of Film Critics Awards	Best Cinematography	Freddie Francis	Nominated	
New York Film Critics Circle Awards	Best Actor	Richard Farnsworth	Won	[34]
	Best Cinematographer	Freddie Francis	Won	
	Best Director	David Lynch	Nominated	
	Best Film		Nominated ^[b]	
Online Film & Television Association	Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen	John Roach, Mary	Nominated	[49]
กรรบบเสแบบ	Best First Screenplay	Sweeney	Nominated	
Online Film Critics Society	Top Ten Films of the Year		7th place	[50]
Awards	Best Actor	Richard Farnsworth	Nominated	
	Best Original Score	Angelo Badalamenti	Nominated	

Award	Category	Nominee(s)	Result	Ref.	
	Best Cinematography	Freddie Francis	Nominated		
Satellite Awards	Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture, Drama	Richard Farnsworth	Nominated	[51]	
	Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role, Drama	Sissy Spacek	Nominated		
Village Voice Film Poll	Best Film		7th place	[52]	

Notes

- a. Distributed by Buena Vista Pictures Distribution through the Walt Disney Pictures banner. [1]
- b. Tied with American Beauty and Being John Malkovich

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External links

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- The Straight Story (https://d23.com/disney-a-to-z/straight-story-the-film) at Disney A to Z
- *The Straight Story* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0166896/) at IMDb
- The Straight Story (https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=straightstory.htm) at Box Office Mojo
- The Straight Story (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/straight_story) at Rotten Tomatoes

■ The Straight Story (https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-straight-story) at Metacritic

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