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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2015 | PARADE.COM

Mark Wahlberg and
Will Ferrell play
feuding fathers
in the new
Christmas comedy
Daddy's Home

By Dotson Rader

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Christmas DADS

Co-stars in the new comedy *Daddy's Home*, Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg reflect on holiday traditions, their families and their not-so-perfect childhoods.

By Dotson Rader
Cover and feature photography
by Robert Trachtenberg

In their new movie opening Christmas Day, *Daddy's Home*, Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg play two mismatched dads ardent competing for something they already have: the love of their kids.

The tricks and antics they use to win the children's loyalty culminate in a wild and very early celebration of the holiday. Ferrell is the nerdy second husband of a suburban housewife and stepdad to her two children. Wahlberg is their near-do-well biological father. When he arrives uninvited at Ferrell's home, dressed in a leather jacket and biker boots and claiming the dominant

paternal role in the family, the fun begins.

"Mark knows how to ride a motorcycle and wear a leather jacket and not look foolish," Ferrell says. "I can't. Mark is that guy in real life. I'm much more like the straight-laced guy I play in the movie—well, maybe not *that* nerdy. I'm perfectly fine with my level of masculinity or lack thereof. But I don't know how to do or fix anything. Mark probably doesn't either, but he could figure it out in a half hour."

Keeping it real

Daddy's Home is about divorce and its powerful impact on families, something

Wahlberg and Ferrell both experienced as children.

"Nowadays there are so many blended families having to cope with a stepparent and a biological parent still involved in some way," Ferrell says. "That was the case in my growing up. I was faced with this traumatic [divorce] experience. How do you navigate that?" Ferrell's parents divorced when he and his brother, Patrick, were in elementary school.

"As a child, I would've preferred to have a magic wand, wave it and go back to how it was," he says. "The way I coped was going, 'Let's make lemonade out of lemons!' I just tried to make the best of it, maybe because I was the older brother."

Ferrell, 48, was raised in a middle-class family in suburban Irvine, Calif., a place about as dull as Andy Griffith's fictional TV haven of Mayberry, he says. His mother, Betty Kay, was a schoolteacher and his father, Roy Lee, was a successful musician with the Righteous Brothers.

Ferrell was a good boy, studious and funny, and a popular athlete on the soccer, basketball and varsity football teams of Irvine's University High School. He went on to the University of Southern California and, after graduation in 1990, became a member of the Groundlings improv comedy troupe. Five years later, he joined the cast of TV's *Saturday Night Live*, rocketing to comedy fame. During his seven years on the late-night sketch show, he branched out into movies, notably *Elf*, *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* and *Talladega Nights*. In 2010 he made his first film with Wahlberg, *The Other Guys*, a comedy about a pair of mismatched cops.

"My parents made life feel safe for me," he says. "My father lived in the same community and once the [divorce] dust settled he made a point of being very involved in raising us. We had a dad who was still in the picture. I was lucky."

Mark 'the Monkey'

Wahlberg, 44, was not so fortunate. Growing up in a tough part of Boston's Dorchester neighborhood as the youngest and smallest of nine kids born into a working-class family, he wore hand-me-down clothes and shared a bedroom with his five brothers.

His nickname, which he hated, was "the Monkey" because, as a little boy, he dragged a stuffed monkey around with him.

Wahlberg's mother, Alma, was a nurse's aide. His late father, Donald, was a truck driver who held down two jobs to make ends meet. Wahlberg and his

dad were unusually close. When he was 10 his parents divorced, his dad moved out and Mark began getting into trouble.

"I still had a great relationship with my dad," he says. "He did everything he could just to put food on the table. I admired that my dad was up at 3 every morning and went out and worked. I bounced back and forth between living with my mom and living with my dad. We only lived a couple miles apart."

Even before his teen years, Wahlberg was headed down a troubled path, skipping school, sneaking out of the house at night and drinking. He dropped out of school for good before he was old enough to drive. He robbed, stole cars and sold drugs. He was

arrested three times.

Finally, at 16, he was convicted for assault and robbery and sentenced to Deer Island prison in Boston Harbor.

"It wasn't until I got locked up that I woke up and realized that I wanted to turn my life around," he says. "I realized that in order to have a good, honest,

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decent life I had to do the work. I had to be willing to change. I had to start right there, from the bottom. When I started really doing good things, good things started happening for me."

And happen they did. After his release, Wahlberg briefly joined *New Kids on the Block*, his brother Donnie's boy band, before finding solo success as rap star Marky Mark. He leveraged that to become the world's most famous and sexiest male underwear model for Calvin Klein. His notoriety became his ticket to Hollywood and he soon found critical success, at 24, as a movie actor opposite Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Basketball Diaries*.

Wahlberg has since become one of the world's top movie box office draws, with starring roles in *Boogie Nights*, *Lone Survivor*, *The Gambler*, *The Departed*—a performance that earned him an Oscar nomination—and the *Ted* films, his blockbuster franchise co-starring a foulmouthed teddy bear.

Family men

While Wahlberg and Ferrell are both children of divorce, they've each managed to maintain healthy marriages themselves—not the norm for Hollywood celebrities in their 40s.

"Well, I'm just lucky in terms of my wife, Viveca," Ferrell says. He married the Swedish art auctioneer and sometime actress Viveca Paulin, 46, in 2000. They live in Southern California with their three sons, Magnus, 11; Mattias, 8; and Axel, 5.

"She has an unreal level of

understanding this business," he says. "So much of the work is out of town for three months at a time. I've never heard her saying, 'Really? You have

Wahlberg also boasts a successful Hollywood marriage, to fashion model Rhea Durham, 37. Before their marriage in 2009, they had three children.



"We click," Will Ferrell says of Mark Wahlberg. "We literally work the same way, playing all the scenes as real as possible. We don't ever 'wink' at the camera."

to leave again? She's totally egoless about my work. She doesn't play the guilt card. We take time every year to go off to Sweden during the summer with the kids. I don't work then. It's an important time for us to be away."

together: Ella, 12; Michael, 9; and Brendan, 7. Grace, their youngest child, is 5.

"Sometimes marriage can be difficult," he admits. "We both come from homes of divorce, but we want our marriage to be successful. We work at it.

We'll go to couples counseling. We want to love and support each other, raise our kids and be there for each other in the good times and the bad. We both believe the same things, and we married for the same reasons. She was already Christian, but she converted to Catholicism so we could marry in the church. That's where I proposed, in the church. When you take those [marriage] vows, you take them very seriously. For me, [keeping them] starts with my doing the right thing in my own home, being a good example, making sure that my kids are raised the right way and do the right thing in the community and the church."

Catholicism plays a defining role in Wahlberg's life, and he makes no attempt to hide it. "I feel very welcomed within my church and the parish community," he says. "I feel comfort... peace... love."

In September, he acted as host to Pope Francis at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. At the event, he half-jokingly apologized for having been in the raunchy movie *Ted*. "Holy Father, please forgive me," he said to the pope. "I've always hoped that the good Lord has a sense of humor when it comes to many of the movies I've made."

Christmas traditions

Like Ferrell, Wahlberg's chief complaint about the demands on his life is that he is not able to spend more time at home with his family.

"I wish they made more movies in L.A.," Wahlberg says. "It would be nice to be

able to get up in the morning, get the kids to school, drive to work, come home, hang out with my family and sleep in my own bed."

He'll be in his own bed this Christmas.

"My wife is very much about the holidays," Wahlberg says. "Everything has to be special and perfect. So on Christmas morning, when the kids are opening their gifts, I'm picking up the wrapping paper, putting it in the trash, and then I spend the rest of the day putting toys together and trying to get the stuff to work. My back will be killing me because the night before Christmas I'll have spent hours in the garage putting gifts together, a bike or a go-kart or a playhouse, something.

"Seeing my kids get into the Christmas spirit, I'll remember when I was a kid and how important it was to us that my parents, no matter what, scraped money together to make Christmas a special, wonderful time. We'll have a great Christmas!"

At the Ferrell home, it's a big Swedish Christmas party "and Tomten, the Swedish Santa, visits," Ferrell says. "It has been rumored that I've played Tomten on occasion, but don't tell my kids. We give a gift to each child, but Tomten makes you earn it. Perhaps someone knows a little song? Or, for the little kids, can you count to five? You have to do something. The kids love it! I'll sing 'Jingle Bells.' That's one of our traditions."

At both households—make no mistake about it—Daddy's definitely home.

PHOTO STYLING BY WARD BROWN/WOODHEAD LADIES; FERRELL'S CANDY: GROOMING BY CATHERINE L'EGRECAFF; TRIPLE WASHBURN: IN AGILITY; MISTOW/THE WALL GROUP; WAHLBERG'S CANDY: MADE BY JOHNNY VILJANOVIC; TRACY MATTHEW/ALC; MARKY MARK: GROOMING BY WENDY RICHMOND; THE WALL GROUP; WAHLBERG'S CANDY: MADE BY JOHNNY VILJANOVIC