

HAROLD AND MAUDE

1971

Universal Pictures. Screenplay by Colin Higgins. Directed by Hal Ashby.
Produced by Colin Higgins and Charles B. Mulvehill.

Setting: The American Southwest, early 1970s

Harold Chasen is a young man with an unusual hobby: staging fake suicides to get his mother's attention. Hardly a day goes by in the sumptuous Chasen mansion without a hanging, shooting, stabbing, or poisoning.

Harold's mother is a shallow woman who believes that she can solve her son's problems by either enlisting him in the army or marrying him off. When he isn't busy dodging dates arranged by his mother, Harold likes to attend funerals. It is at a funeral that he first meets Maude, a seventy-nine-year-old widow who is possessed of a lust for living that any sixteen-year-old would envy.

Maude befriends the somber young man, and is eventually able to draw him out of his dark fantasy world. She teaches Harold how to enjoy life by endowing him with a touch of exuberance that was heretofore lacking in his soul. Harold falls in love with the vivacious Maude, and they begin a relationship. Harold is unaware, however, that Maude plans to commit suicide on her eightieth birthday. He informs his mother that he plans to marry Maude and goes to celebrate her birthday. By the time Maude tells him of her plan, she has taken the pills; it is too late to save her life. The master of fake suicides finds himself helpless when faced with reality.

Grief-stricken, Harold drives his car over a cliff. After it crashes, we see that he managed to jump out before it went over. All he has left is a banjo given to him by Maude which he strums as he heads off into the sunset.

HAROLD

Harold finally breaks down and confesses to Maude the reason why he stages fake suicides.

I haven't lived, but I've died a few times. The first time was in boarding school in the chemistry lab. I was cleaning it up. So,

I decided I'd do a little experimenting, you know? So, I get all this stuff out and begin mixing it up. It was very scientific. There was this massive explosion. It knocked me down, blew a huge hole in the floor. There were boards and bricks and flames leaping up. I figured, you know, time for me to leave. My career in school was over. So I went home. My mother was giving a party, so I went right up the back stairs, turned out the light, and I got this funny feeling. The doorbell rang and these two policemen came in, found my mother, and told her that I was killed in the fire. She put one hand up to her forehead, and the other she reached out, groping for support; and with this long sigh she collapsed in their arms. I decided right then, I enjoyed being dead.