

Family Man

Nick Cassavetes' very personal reasons for directing *My Sister's Keeper*

Nick Cassavetes knows a thing or two about parenting a sick child. His daughter Sasha was born with congenital heart disease. Now 21 and healthy, she endured multiple surgeries and hospital stays to treat her condition. So when Warner Bros. came to the director, writer, and former actor with a draft of the adaptation of Jodi Picoult's hit novel, *My Sister's Keeper*, he was immediately drawn to the story of a family who produces a daughter for one reason: to save their older daughter's life. "It hit home for me pretty hard," says Cassavetes, who ultimately cowrote the script and directed the film, which hit theaters June 26.

Creating a life for the specific purpose of saving another might sound a bit, well, creepy, but not to Cassavetes. "Your job as a parent is to keep your child alive at any cost, he says. "Difficult ethical situations are one thing; your child dying is something else. And that something else takes precedence."

But what if saving one child's life infringes on the rights of the other? "Getting pricked by needles is different than putting another one of your children in direct harm's way," he counters. When asked if he would have created another child to cure his daughter, he answers instantly: "There's no extent on earth I would not go to help my child."

Cassavetes is willing to put his money where his mouth is. He recently offered to donate a kidney to a friend who's on dialysis. But because Cassavetes had malaria as a child, he was unable to donate. Otherwise he would have gone under the knife without question. "What else are we on the planet for? If somebody needs something and you can help, you help them," he says simply.



Cassavetes works with Cameron Diaz on the *My Sister's Keeper* set.

Ethics aside, Cassavetes, the son of actor Gena Rowlands and the late, acclaimed director/actor John Cassavetes, feels the film's powerful story will connect with viewers. "It's the journey a family takes when a child is sick," he says. And what does Cassavetes hope viewers will be talking about when they leave the theater? "Hopefully they'll want to run out and hug their children." —*Lois Peper*

DRUM ROLL, PLEASE

As a boy in Yonkers, Joey Kramer took solace in his drums. The skins were his focus when his father beat him, when he was kicked out of class, when he felt lost. But Kramer also had a vision for his music. It would one day make him famous. While still in high school, he coined his future band's name, Aerosmith.

In his combined rock band memoir/autobiography *Hit Hard: A Story of Riding Rock Bottom at the Top*, Kramer relates Aerosmith's meteoric rise to success. And the low points. At the height of its popularity, the band was struggling, as Kramer,



who often played while high, was propped up in his seat by roaches. "We'd become drug addicts dabbling in music, as opposed to musicians dabbling in drugs," writes Kramer. Eventually he got clean, but sobriety didn't mean stability, and for a decade he battled depression and anxiety. *Hit Hard* is a window into addiction and abuse made vivid by the

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passionate, clear, and optimistic voice of a man who has looked his rough-and-tumble story in the eye and made peace.

"I forgive you for abusing me physically so many times," he writes in a handwritten note to his father. "I forgive you for not being there when I needed you." Simple words, but they took a lifetime of struggle to come by.

Hit Hard is an instructive read, documenting a path out of destruction. "I'm in an infinitely better place," writes Kramer. "And finally feel deserving and comfortable." —*Eve Pearson*