

# THE EXAMINER

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## Root for the real Erin Brockovich

March 25 is a date of importance to all American movie fans. It is the date for this year's Oscars, honoring excellence in the motion picture industry.

As anyone who has followed these events readily understands, the "Oscars" awarded for Best Picture and Best Actor and Actress performances represent the cream of the crop. The statuettes are coveted items without parallel. One of these small statues on the mantle of any Hollywood or international participant's home is nothing less than an ongoing guarantee of employment for at least another 10 years!

This year I am rooting for everything connected with "Erin Brockovich."

Julia Roberts played the role of Erin Brockovich in the movie. She is nominated for Best Actress. The reason for my interest lies in the fact that Erin Brockovich is a real person and the movie by the same name is about real events that actually took place several years ago in California.

My wife is always entranced by the depiction of real events and real



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persons on television or the movie screen. The Brockovich film had an unusual double dose of reality.

In the real world, Erin's mother and father were students at the University of Kansas at the same time that I was in the late 1940s. Their real names are Frank and B.J. Patee. Frank was a stalwart on the KU football team. Following graduation, B.J. became a valued employee of the KU Alumni Association. She was the executive director of the "Flying Jayhawks" and was responsible for all of the fabulous alumni trips to Europe and to the Orient, which were well received by the members of the association. I remember B.J. mothering a flock of traveling Jayhawk senior citizens in Spain, Japan, and Hong Kong.

At the time that my wife and I were traveling about the world with the Patees and the other Flying Jayhawks, the fact that someday there would be a movie about their only child, who had ultimately married (and divorced) a guy named "Brockovich" was about as far-fetched as me winning the state lottery!

So now you know what I will be doing during the night of the Academy Award presentations. I still think the movie "Erin Brockovich" was one of the best that I have ever seen. It has it all - drama, comedy, mystery, a pretty leading lady, and a happy ending.

Julia Roberts will likely, in the audience at the Academy Awards. I am also quite certain that the real Erin Brockovich will also be watching - perhaps from her home in California.

Some great anonymous philosopher once stated it best: "Truth indeed is stranger than fiction."

*Keith Wilson, former Independence city manager, writes this column for The Examiner.*