

The Way We Get By



The Way We Get By is a documentary that starts out focusing on the work of the

troop greeters in Bangor, Maine. This group of senior citizens goes to the Bangor International Airport at any hour of the day or night to greet outgoing and incoming US troops. Oddly enough, Bangor is the main departure and return point for those serving overseas. The greeters, some retired military themselves, offer service men and women a warm welcome, snacks and free cell phones to call their loved ones. Those arriving at 3 am receive the same enthusiastic greeting as those coming at 11 am, rain, sleet or snow. This seemingly small gesture has a big impact on those returning from overseas, many unsure of how they would be received or concerned about returning to life in the US.

But there's another layer to the story, one that's possibly even more touching- that of the lives of the greeters themselves. Focusing on three of the senior citizens the film becomes a study of aging, loneliness, and the universal search for a sense of purpose in our lives.

Joan Gaudet, the widowed mother of eight (and grandmother of many more), overcomes daily health struggles to greet the troops. Prior to joining the greeters she frequently did not leave her house, but now goes to the airport in all weather at all times of the day and night. Unable to keep from crying when seeing off those who are leaving, she has to see two of her own grandchildren off at one point. Bill Knight, in his 80s, is a retired 32 year veteran. He now lives in near squalor, faces possible bankruptcy and finds out he has prostate cancer. Meeting the troops keeps him going. And Jerry Mundy, also a former Marine, greets service men and women with jokes and laughter. But he develops heart trouble and loses his only companion- his dog of 16 years during filming. These troubles don't keep him from greeting the men and women in uniform. All three wonder what they will do when they no longer greet the troops.

At the end of the film (2008) the troop greeters have welcomed more than 500,000 men and women back into the United States. I looked at their website today and they have since greeted more than 1,400,000 troops. The difference this group of ordinary people have made in the lives of US soldiers is astounding. I was both touched and inspired by this compelling documentary.

Posted by Elizabeth G. on September 25, 2013

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