

"A Little Kindness Makes A World Of Difference"

Just watched "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" last night. This heartfelt documentary is directed by Morgan Neville ("20 Feet From Stardom"). The film chronicles the life of Fred Rogers' and the beginning and end of his beloved show "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" that has inspired generation after generation.

It's a little known fact that I LOVE documentary filmmaking. As long as the subject material interests me I'm willing to watch. Still to this day, I think "Super Size Me" and "The Greatest Movie Ever Sold" are two of the best documentaries around. I am also deeply invested in seeing "An Inconvenient Truth" and it's sequel "An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth To Power". My point is that I appreciate documentary filmmaking and this film is no exception.

It may surprise a lot you but before I saw this film, I knew virtually NOTHING about Mr. Rogers, what he did or who he was. After having seen the film, I feel like I know him on a deeply intimate level now. That's a testament to the people involved in this project. The fact that they were able to bring me into this world and educate me on such a visceral and emotional level was astounding. I'm just going to get it out of the way now. This film is just PHENOMENAL. Everything about it. I left the film wanting to give it a great big hug as Mr. Rogers did to countless kids throughout it.

This isn't going to be in the usual review structure that I normally use. After all this film isn't about the cinematography or the effects. It's about who this guy was and the message he communicated to children and adults over the many years of his life. He was always present. He never spoke with anger or spite to anyone. Instead he spoke with honesty and compassion. He genuinely cared about children and the lessons he felt obligated to teach them. He connected with them on a profoundly human level. He understood them and loved them for who they were. Every time he said that in the film, I felt like he was talking to me and I had to fight back the tears almost every ten minutes. What a incredible human being! To be able to have that kind of compassion and dedication just blows my mind.

The film doesn't shy away from talking about difficult situations and themes either. Rogers centered his show around the concept of "death" for an entire week. That takes guts. In his show, he also talked about racism, assassination and sexual orientation to name a few. It's the way he communicated these themes through his sock puppet "Daniel" that made it so meaningful and effective. I never thought I'd tear up at a talking puppet but alas here we are. He explained these concepts with such eloquence and restraint to the point where I was in complete awe. That was just one of his many gifts. He showed up to work everyday with a smile on his face and that same purest of energy. He loved what he did to the fullest extent. Kids grew up with him. He created a safe haven for them to feel special and loved. It just fills my heart with joy as I talk about it.

I will briefly talk about the film's technical aspects before I conclude. The level of subtlety and restraint this film had brilliantly mirrored Mr. Rogers himself. He once said that he truly believed silence was one of the world's greatest gifts, and he was right. This movie utilizes silence like it's a character. Some of the most powerful scenes were of Mr. Rogers just smiling and sharing his thoughts and opinions with the audience. He was subtle while also being incredibly patient with the audience. The last few minutes of the film left me with no words.

To conclude, I ADORE this film. It's beautifully crafted and refreshingly honest in its depiction. Mr. Rogers was a BEAUTIFUL human being in every sense of the word. This is easily the best documentary I've ever seen. It's a thoughtful window into the life of an extraordinary man. In this day in age, it is the film we do NEED right now. Especially now. The minute you get a chance to see this, take it! You won't regret it. Just be sure to bring the tissues. I'm absolutely going to give "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" 5/5 stars. Not to endorse the film anymore but it's currently at 99% on Rotten Tomatoes and it more than deserves it.