

THE WAY WE GET BY

sometimes all it takes is a handshake to change a life.



PRESS KIT

Opens in LA on August 14, 2009

Running Time: 84 min

www.TheWayWeGetByMovie.com

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Short Synopsis:

The Way We Get By is a seemingly idiosyncratic story about troop greeters — a group of senior citizens who gather daily at a small airport to thank American soldiers departing and returning from Iraq, but the film quickly turns into a moving, unsettling and compassionate story about aging, loneliness, war and mortality. The film carefully builds stories of heartbreak and redemption, reminding us how our culture casts our elders, and too often our soldiers, aside. More important, regardless of your politics, *The Way We Get By* celebrates three unsung heroes who share their love with strangers who need and deserve it.

Long Synopsis:

The award winning *The Way We Get By* is a deeply moving film about life and how to live it. Beginning as a seemingly idiosyncratic story about troop greeters - a group of senior citizens who gather daily at a small airport to thank American soldiers departing and returning from Iraq, the film quickly turns into a moving, unsettling and compassionate story about aging, loneliness, war and mortality.

When its three subjects aren't at the airport, they wrestle with their own problems: failing health, depression, mounting debt. Joan, a grandmother of eight, has a deep connection to the soldiers she meets. The sanguine Jerry keeps his spirits up even as his personal problems mount. And the veteran Bill, who clearly has trouble taking care of himself, finds himself contemplating his own death. Seeking out the telling detail rather than offering sweeping generalizations, the film carefully builds stories of heartbreak and redemption, reminding us how our culture casts our elders, and too often our soldiers, aside. More important, regardless of your politics, *The Way We Get By* celebrates three unsung heroes who share their love with strangers who need and deserve it.



Characters:

Bill Knight (Age 87)

On the day Bill found out he had cancer, he was still the first one to the airport. An eccentric World War II veteran, Bill knows firsthand what a thank you means to a soldier. When troops returned from Vietnam without any recognition for serving their country, Bill made a promise to never let it happen again. So now he executes each greeting with military precision, supporting the soldiers unconditionally.

Outside the airport, Bill's life is spiraling out of control. While battling his spreading cancer, Bill is also drowning in financial debt. With time running out and creditors hounding him, Bill is forced to make a decision that will change his life forever.

Joan Gaudet (Age 75)

Joan was afraid to go out after dark. Three knee operations forced her to use a walker, leaving her fearful of falling. After spending her life caring for her eight children, Joan was left living alone in an empty nest. But five years ago everything changed. Joan discovered troop greeting, and it quickly became an addiction. What she loves the most is learning about each soldier's family. But as a mother and grandmother, she welcomes them home, but can never say goodbye.

Joan has to confront her issues of letting go when she discovers her granddaughter AMY (30), a Blackhawk helicopter pilot, will soon be deployed to Iraq.

Jerry Mundy (Age 74)

Jerry can usually be found parked near the airport runway. Sitting in his truck with his dog and best friend, Mr. Flannigan, he watches for troop planes overhead. When he spots one, if he's fast enough, he can be inside the airport before the wheels touch the ground. With troop greeting, Jerry's goal is simple-put a smile on each soldier's face. This small act helps him cope with the tragic death of his son.

Haunted by these memories and facing unexplained heart problems, Jerry must come to terms with his own mortality following the sudden death of a close friend.

Director's Statement:

This is a very personal story to me. My mother, Joan Gaudet, is a troop greeter and a character in the film. Witnessing firsthand how her life changed in such positive ways, while at the same time touching the lives of troops from all over the country, convinced me this was a story that could inspire people. This is a unique film, encompassing important social issues and controversial topics, while remaining a story that every American can support. While troop greeting may not



be an option for many of the nation's seniors, it demonstrates how community involvement can significantly improve the lives of the elderly in America.

Throughout *The Way We Get By*, each character tells their own story, without the aid of narration, through on-camera interviews and moments of verite. Unlimited access to our characters provides an in-depth look into their lives. Keeping the camera static whenever possible allows each of them to quickly forget they are being filmed, removing any barriers between them and the viewer. The result of this shooting style is a well-crafted, layered story with a polished, cinematic look that enables the viewer to feel they are experiencing these personal moments alongside the characters. The pacing of the film appropriately matches the subject matter, allowing each storyline to breathe, while capturing life in a small town.

Principal Crew & Credits:



Aron Gaudet

Director / Editor / Co-Director of Photography

Aron Gaudet made his feature directorial debut with the award-winning documentary, *THE WAY WE GET BY*, which had its world premiere at the South By Southwest Film Festival (SXSW) where it won the Special Jury Award.

THE WAY WE GET BY has won 11 awards to date including the Audience Award at the Full Frame Film Festival and Best Documentary at the Atlanta, Little Rock, Phoenix and Newport International Film Festival.

Gaudet has over a decade of experience working in television news and has won a total of 8 Telly Awards, 2 Emmy nominations, 2 Vermont Association of Broadcasters awards, and a Michigan Association of Broadcasters award.



Gita Pullapilly
Producer / Interviewer

Gita Pullapilly produced her first feature-length film--the award-winning documentary, THE WAY WE GET BY, which had its world premiere at the South By Southwest Film Festival (SXSW) and won the Special Jury Award.

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Pullapilly began her career as a television reporter. She has been honored with a number of distinctions for her work—including the University of Notre Dame Asian American Alumni Association Exemplar Award; 2 Associated Press Awards, a Michigan Association of Broadcasters Award, three Telly awards, and a Northwestern University Scholarship for Outstanding Storytelling.

She became a Fulbright Senior Scholar in 2005 and was inducted into the Royal Society of the Arts in 2008. Pullapilly graduated from the University of Notre Dame with a B.B.A. in Finance and holds a master's degree from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

Film Credits:

Directed, Edited and Written By: **Aron Gaudet**

Produced By: **Gita Pullapilly**

Executive Producer: **Warren Cook**

Directors of Photography: **Aron Gaudet & Dan Ferrigan**

Interviewer: **Gita Pullapilly**

Associate Producer: **Jessica Barnthouse**

Original Score: **Zack Martin**

Production Stills: **Sean Carnell**

Website Services: **Bluehouse Group**



PLEASE VISIT THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE TO VIEW THE THEATRICAL TRAILER:

www.TheWayWeGetByMovie.com

Airport Facts:

- President Bush and former President Clinton have greeted troops at the Bangor International Airport.
- Bangor is the first major American airport encountered by airliners approaching the United States from the east as well as the last major airport for airliners heading towards Europe. Coupled with a runway that is more than two miles (3.2 km) long and an uncluttered airspace, the airport has been a favorite for airplanes diverted due to adverse weather conditions at the destination airport, bomb threats, or the presence of unruly passengers on-board.
- Transatlantic flights are also sometimes diverted to Bangor when they experience mechanical trouble or other issues. Among those who've made unscheduled stops for that reason are former President George H. W. Bush and Colin Powell, and actors Clint Eastwood and Harrison Ford, and musician Cat Stevens.
- Bangor is also an emergency landing site for the space shuttle.

Film Festivals & Awards:

WINNER: Special Jury Award, SXSW Film Festival

WINNER: Audience Award, Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

WINNER: Standing Up Film Competition, Cleveland International Film Festival

WINNER: Eric Parker Social Justice Award, Indianapolis Intl. Film Festival

WINNER: Best Documentary, Phoenix Film Festival

WINNER: Best Documentary, Atlanta Film Festival

WINNER: Best Documentary, Newport International Film Festival

WINNER: Audience Award, Newport International Film Festival

WINNER: Best Documentary, Little Rock Film Festival

WINNER: Audience Award, Camden International Film Festival

HONORABLE MENTION: Feature Documentary, IFF Boston

AWARDED: Governor's Award for Film & Public Service

OFFICIAL SELECTION:

SXSW Film Festival

Hot Docs Canadian Documentary Film Festival

Silver Docs AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Film Festival

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

True/False Film Festival

Camden International Film Festival

IFF Boston

Florida Film Festival

Cleveland International Film Festival

Phoenix Film Festival

Atlanta Film Festival

Wisconsin Film Festival

Sarasota Film Festival

Philadelphia Film Festival

Newport Beach Film Festival

Newport International Film Festival

Nantucket Film Festival

Little Rock Film Festival

Big Sky Documentary Film Festival

Indianapolis Film Festival

Woods Hole Film Festival

Southern Circuit Tour

Filmmakers Notes:

The Way We Get By follows three senior citizens over the course of three years as they spend their days and nights traveling to their tiny local airport to greet troops heading to and returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Greeting over 800,000 troops gives their lives a renewed sense of purpose and allows them to overcome their obstacles outside the airport, which can be numerous for an elderly person in America. And one of the greeters happens to be my mother, Joan Gaudet.

For a couple of years prior to discovering troop greeting, my mom had few friends and fewer hobbies and basically spent her days alone at home, literally watching birds. I was working at a television station in Michigan at the time, and would call home often, and one day she wasn't there to answer the phone. Prior to her becoming a troop greeter, she spent her days at home looking for something to fill her life. As a mother of eight children (I'm the baby) I think she had a very severe case of empty nest syndrome. She had taken care of people her entire life and now had no one to look after. Soon after she became a troop greeter, it very quickly became nearly impossible to get her on the phone, and even tougher to have a conversation that didn't involve the subject of troop greeting.

When she discovered troop greeting, it was a perfect fit. My mother was suddenly out at all hours of the day and night, making the drive to and from the airport to greet hundreds upon hundreds of troop flights. So, when I went home for Christmas in 2004, the first thing I wanted to do was see how she was spending all of her time. I followed her to a late night flight and I was pretty instantly hooked. The emotion that was in that airport on a daily basis was amazing-- it just seemed like if we could find the right way to tell a story, it would have heart. What struck me first was that this is a place where 80-year-olds and 20-year-olds are coming together and helping each other face their problems, and I couldn't really think of anyplace else you could find something like that. Seeing first hand how this was transforming my mom's life just made me so proud to be her son. As I watched this become her mission and really transform her life, I started to think it could make a great short documentary. After I met the other two troop greeters we follow in the film, I knew it could be much more, and we set out to make it a feature.

I agree that this is a patriotic film, but we definitely didn't set out thinking "let's go make a patriotic film." ... Our first thought was just that what the Maine Troop Greeters are doing is a genuine act of kindness, and there aren't many purely good things like that happening out there. It just seemed like a story worth telling. Our initial plan was to try to look past the politics and make a film that was just about supporting the troops.

Everything changed as soon as we went home with our three subjects. The moment we saw what their lives were like outside the airport the focus shifted, and we knew that the film was really about aging in America. What do we all go through, as we grow older? And how much does having a purpose in your life affect everything else? But even as we were walking into the edit room with all of our footage we still weren't sure what the film was "about" because we weren't quite sure what we had. We knew we had a lot of

emotional moments and the three subjects had all gone through a lot while we were following them, but could we craft it into a story? The three months last summer editing the film and finding that story was the hardest part of the entire process for me. But after working through that process, what I ended up finding was a beautiful and touching film with three amazing characters.

Early on we made the decision that we would never keep any distance between our subjects and us. We would become friends with them, and we would let them become a part of our lives just as much as we became a part of theirs, and we would not desert them when the film was done. But we also made a decision early on that we wouldn't cut them any slack or give them any breaks. ... Even my mom would never get special treatment. It just felt like that was the only way to tell their story. We never wanted to be condescending to them and their struggles.

We had a very small crew shooting this film. Through production it was a three-person crew. Co-director of photography Dan Ferrigan and I would operate the two cameras-- we nearly always had two cameras-- and producer Gita Pullapilly handled all the logistics of field producing and was the interviewer. Then during post-production it became a two-person crew. Gita was working hard to find funding and distribution opportunities while I was locked away in an editing room. We even logged and imported all the footage ourselves. I guess we discovered interns pretty late in the game, and then we got as many as we could find. But we really didn't know any other way. I've always done every aspect of the editing myself, so it didn't feel different, just a little more overwhelming.

As for using a larger crew, the movie would not be the same if we had tried to go in there with a bigger crew or a bunch of lights. Our goal from the beginning was to make these people forget about the camera, and create a comfortable atmosphere. There were many occasions when it really became just an intimate conversation between Gita and the subject, and in those instances it was my job and Dan's job to basically become invisible. We shot on tripods as much as possible, and I would try to be as motionless as possible and really just hide behind the camera. Of course, there were times we could have used an extra pair of hands, but the trade off is what I hope is a really intimate film. I have seen a lot of films about Iraq and Afghanistan and I wanted the film to work for people on both sides of the debate. It's really a personal story not a political one. That goes for the greeters themselves as well. They have different views on the war, but their main goal is to support the troops. I didn't want people to leave the film angry. I met soldiers who said, "No one knows about all the good work we do there." and those that said "no one knows how bad it is there." It's a complicated issue.

During production, I was often emotionally moved. Our three characters would really bare their souls to us at times, and it always shocked us and left us a little shaken as well, that they would be so open and honest with us about how they were feeling and what they were going through, including my mom. I remember on more than one occasion leaving an interview and talking to Gita and Dan about how emotional we all were. We might not have been sure at the time how everything fit together, but we knew they were giving us some amazing material to work with-- and it definitely became a worry of mine that these three people put their trust in us and opened up to us, and I didn't want to screw it up.

Filming at Bangor International Airport is a bit of an oddity. Because of the eastern location and the size of the runway, they are the perfect place for these military flights to refuel. This means for the majority of troops, Bangor is the last piece of U.S. soil they touch before going to war, and the first piece they step foot on when coming home. As far as gaining access, it was surprisingly easy. From the start, the officials at the airport really opened the terminal up to us. It certainly helped that the airport is pretty small, and outside of all the thousands of troop flights going through, it's not a very busy airport. There were certain things that Gita had to work very hard getting us access to-- going out on the runway or boarding a troop flight-- but overall it was much easier than we expected. We were very fortunate to have that kind of access.

The biggest challenge we had was finding funding. Getting potential funders to understand that the film is about so much more than just senior citizens shaking hands with troops was a very tough sell. Convincing them that the film was really about life and all the struggles that present themselves each day, and how these simple handshakes dramatically change the lives of the greeters as well as the troops in really emotional and poignant ways. Needless to say we were rejected from nearly every funding source. But when we needed the money the most, we were able to find an executive producer to come on board with the funding to finish the film.

During the filming process, I learned many lessons. I really learned how to make a movie over the last four years working on this film. This was my "film school." Every aspect from pre-production through distribution is full of lessons, trial and error, strained and broken friendships, and learning from mistakes. There really is no right or wrong way, and nobody is getting in line to tell you how to do everything. It really comes down to learning how to do-it-yourself. And I'm still learning every day. In television, the whole distribution part of it is already in place for you. I would shoot and edit a promo and it would be on the air that night. Now, the biggest challenge is figuring how to get people to see your movie after it's finished. The one thing I will not do is be a filmmaker that finishes a movie and expects it to magically find it's way to an audience. Gita and I work 7 days a week now, trying to figure out the best ways to get the film out there. The question continues to come up: Are you willing to take your film city-to-city, town-to-town if that is what it takes? And the answer is yes, we are.