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WISCONSIN FILM FESTIVAL

Long Shadows: Veterans' Paths to Peace at the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival

This documentary about Madison activists screened Sunday at the Historical Society

Kristian Knutsen on Monday 04/16/2007 11:04:38.

Opening to the strains of "Ashokan Farewell" on a solo violin and a quote from Howard Zinn, Long Shadows travels through 65 years of war to introduce veterans of the United States Armed Forces who have since turned to working for peace.

Directed by Luciano, an independent video journalist and filmmaker who broadcasts regularly on WYOU, the documentary features interviews with eight Madison peace activists. Bracketed by images of artwork created by David Giffey, each person shares their personal experiences of serving during wartime (complete with vintage photos) and explains how they came to be peace activists. All are members of Madison Veterans for Peace, an nationwide organization dedicated to the abolishment of war.

This local chapter of the national group is named for Clarence Kailin, the iconic and beloved dean of Madison peace activists who fought with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. This iconic and beloved dean of Madison peace activists is interviewed early in the documentary, which gradually progresses though time for conversations with veterans from every major war since: World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Sidney Podell, who served as a B-29 bombardier in the Pacific during the Second World War discusses his experiences flying missions over Tokyo and ponders the perspective that come with victory. As he started thinking shortly after returning home: "If we had lost the war," he says, "I'm sure I would have been branded as a war criminal."

Veterans of subsequent American wars each discussed their disillusionment when it came to the reasons for fighting provided by politicians. Robert Kimbrough, an emeritus professor of English at the UW discussed this in the context of his experiences as a platoon leader in the Marine Corps in Korea. Vietnam veterans Will Williams and Mike Boehm, both of whom served in the U.S. Army in the late '60s, discussed their reasons for enlisting. Trying to escape Jim Crow and please one's father, respectively, they each spent many subsequent years trying to reconcile their experiences in the war and eventually turning to peace activism.

Two veterans of the latest war -- in Afghatistan and Iraq -- share similar feelings, albeit it over a far more compressed timeline. The most moving story is that told by Joe Cammarano, who served with the Marines in Vietnam. He told haunting tale of encountering the mutilated bodies of American servicepersons and his struggle in the following decades to understand it. Long Shadows is dedicated to Cammarano, who passed away in 2003.

The auditorium at the Wisconsin State Historical Society was filled to capacity for the screening, which was paired with Cut by Wendy Schneider in a local documentary double feature. "The screening went very, very well," says Luciano. "It was nice because these movies brought two crowds together that might not have mixed."

Long Shadows will be airing on WYOU on Thursday, Apr. 26 at 7 p.m., and is available for purchase at Rainbow Bookstore Co-op and from Atwood Publishing. Luciano also notes that Madison Veterans for Peace received a grant to place the video in every public and school library in Dane County.

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