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Quiet Heroes

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Quiet Heroes

Abstract

This is a film review of *Quiet Heroes* (2018), directed by Jenny Mackenzie, Jared Ruga, and Amanda Stoddard.

Keywords

HIV, AIDS, Mormons, Utah, Homosexuality, LGBTQ

Author Notes

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Quiet Heroes (2018), dir. Jenny Mackenzie, Jared Ruga, and Amanda Stoddard

I think of this movie as one of three interwoven stories. First there is the story of HIV/Aids. How mysterious the disease was, how quickly it appeared and how quickly it became an epidemic, how devastatingly cruel it was and how quickly it brought death, a very painful death. This part of the story reminds us how quickly things can change, how vulnerable we are to forces beyond our control. And it demonstrates our fear of living in a world in which we are not in charge, over which we have little control.

The second story is about the response to HIV/AIDS. This is the part of the story that makes you angry. Only one doctor in Salt Lake City and the surrounding area, Dr. Kristen Ries, would treat patients with HIV/AIDS. Other doctors refused to do so, failing to follow the physician's dictum to "first, do no harm." The political response brought out a number of laws against homosexuality, even attacking married couples where one partner was gay. And maybe most important was the religious response. In Utah, much of the religious response came from the LDS Church, but they were not alone in their attack on homosexuals. Many said that this was

God's way of punishing sinners, that gays deserved this ravaging disease, that this was a case of just deserts. Families were torn apart, gays were exiled from their communities and failed to receive treatment that might have helped them, all in the name of religion.

Finally there is the story of the "quiet heroes." As horrible as the disease was and as ugly as the public response was, the story of the quiet heroes is inspiring. It is a story about the power of the human spirit. Dr. Ries and her physician's assistant, Maggie Snyder, worked tirelessly to provide medical help and emotional support to a group of people society wanted to get rid of or at least ignore. While the movie focuses on Kristen Ries and Maggie Snyder, there were many other quiet heroes as well. When Dr. Ries had to hospitalize her patients, they were taken in by Holy Cross Hospital, run by the Sisters of the Holy Cross. The Sisters actually set up an HIV ward in the hospital, something that was totally unheard of. But, as Sister Linda Bellemore says, "We are not here to convert people to Catholicism; we're here to say, what are your needs and what can we help you with?" And then there is the wife who becomes infected with HIV through her husband, but stays with him to raise a family and make his life fulfilling in the short time that is left. And there is the boss who tells his employee that as long as he can work, he will have a job.

At the end of the movie, Kristen Ries and Maggie Snyder are recognized by the Mayor of Salt Lake City in a formal ceremony for their contributions to the history of the city. In accepting that award, Maggie Snyder says: "May we remember to love and take care of our fellow humans, for it is all that we really have." These are the words of a quiet hero.