

There is much in today's films, newspapers, books that can seem negative to psychoanalysis. The lack of understanding, and resistance to knowing, and to use psychoanalysis is upsetting to those who love analysis. It is sheer joy when we find an occurrence that reassures us that there is a large body of people who respond to, and want the analytic viewpoint even though they don't call it that. They applaud it, love it, hold it dear and honor it, even when it is not recognized as analytic insight.

Such an instance has happened with the popularity, esteem and love of the documentary, "Won't you be my neighbor", directed by Morgan Neville of Fred Rogers and his children's TV program that started in 1968.

Fred Rogers said on his first show, a child told him his dog's ear came off in the washing machine. Rogers said he was indeed sorry and proceeded to tell the little boy that his ear would not come off. It would stay on, washing machine or no. Arms also. The child wanted to know if his leg would come off. No. Mr. Rogers didn't tell him mommy would sew it back on or he could get a new dog from a company who happened to sponsor the show. As he addressed what was really concerning the child, I knew I was watching an analytically sensitive man who knew what the child was asking, and from then on I followed the film carefully and loved it.

In 1959, Selma Fraiberg's "The Magic Years" on child development came out and in those years, Benjamin Spock became a household name. Fred Rogers was a theology student working towards becoming an ordained Presbyterian minister. He wanted to work with young children. For counseling experience, he was assigned to work under the supervision of Margaret McFarland, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh.

In 1953, Margaret McFarland founded the Arsenal Family & Children's Center with pediatrician Benjamin Spock, author of "The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care", who was on the medical school faculty with Margaret and with Erik Erikson, author of "Childhood and Society". Erikson spent one day a week there and said of Margaret, "Margaret McFarland knew more than anyone in this world about families with young children."

For 30 years, until her death, Fred Rogers met with Margaret McFarland and often talked to her daily. She planned the shows with him, discussed children, scripts, props, songs, lyrics. She was his mentor, friend and teacher. He styled the show with her and under her direction. Fred Rogers felt television was a great media to reach children. He hated the children's programs which were then on television. They were brainless, bad slapstick sequences or mindless cartoons that were mainly made up of chases. He felt he didn't have to wear a silly hat to get the attention of the children and to invite them into a conversation. He invented his neighborhood, with a variety of people and puppets who were regulars in the neighborhood and provided anecdotes and a celebration of daily life through music, conversation and make believe.

This film almost hit the top score in having no negative or critical reviews at all, but it had one which kept it from the almost unattainable perfect grade. The negative review didn't criticize the movie but stated that Fred Rogers was a more complex man than the film showed. He was not that simple and pure.

That may be, but the film is not a biography of this man, but is a trip back in time to see how Fred and the children connected as the children found a friend who treated them with respect and seriousness in their observation of life. If one is looking for Roger's frailties, they are there, but the film is not centered on that.

Some areas of conflicts are mentioned. Francois Clemmons who played Officer Clemmons went to a gay nightclub which he enjoyed, but Rogers told him, he could not go there any more. Rogers told him if he came out as gay, he would lose his job. He told Francois that he, Rogers did not think he was immoral, nor did he have an issue with it but his sponsors would not tolerate an outwardly gay man on a children's show in 1969 and Rogers was not about to lose his show.

Francois actually married but it ended in divorce. He didn't hate Fred Rogers. He loved him. Fred said he loved Francois just the way he was. Francois regarded Fred Rogers as a surrogate father. He said no one had ever said to him that they loved him just the way he was.

The film is done in short interviews, his son appears to say it was a problem being the son of the second Christ (brought a big laugh from the audience).

Fred also had a self made directive that he had to keep his weight at 143 lbs. his entire life which kept him very attached to his scale. If he observed anything offbeat at home, his son said, he spoke of it through Lady Elaine, a cat puppet.

A sock puppet named Daniel Lion was his alter ego and the authority figure was a puppet, King Friday the 13th. Both were used amply, not to show bad and good, but to outline and confront the problems of daily life. King Friday the Thirteenth was named this, because people were superstitious about Friday the 13th, so to counter attack superstitious fear, he made that the puppet's name and also his birthday. Whenever Friday the 13th appeared on the calendar, his birthday was celebrated on the show. King Friday the 13th went to King and Queen School and ruled over the land of Make Believe. He was known to create outrageous and random rules and expected everyone to obey him. He was a quite good parental figure.

Rogers did not want to have a program that had a sponsor. What he hated most about TV was its consumerism. He didn't want to sell anything or be tied to the demands of a sponsor so he tried only to appear on public TV. When the funds for that were going to be cut (under Nixon) he appeared before congress and treated them with the same respect and stories he had for the children. Congress retained the \$20 million allotted to public TV at that time in response to his plea.

He honored the children's questions seriously when they asked difficult ones such as divorce. He always had an honest answer. Sometimes 2 people can't live with each other anymore. President Kennedy was assassinated during this time. What is assassination? Well, it is when someone is killed in a surprising way. 911 was a terrible time for him to explain this to children. He suffered with this problem, but he could not spare them from the truth.

When the film was over, the audience applauded as if there was a live cast and walked out connected and animated. Many were tearful. It is very much a loved movie.

It is 94 minutes long, do see it, and enjoy the thought that the unnamed sponsor for Roger's talents as an artist, puppeteer and musician, who loved children so much, found that the meaningful and loving secret to make the show work was an analytic insight to children that lead this kind man, to the understanding he sought. Selma Duckler