CAREGIVING CONCERNS

The video & Thou Shalt Honor is an ambitious attempt to survey the landscape of caregiving concerns in America and suggest alternatives that deserve wider adoption and consideration. The video features more than 20 stories about caregivers, the care recipients, and individuals and programs that are trying to change the culture of caregiving. Coverage of these subjects includes the following topics: caregiving in the home, caregiver burnout, long-distance caregiving, institutional care, and volunteerism. The video emphasizes model programs and services, the promise of reformers, and the need to change governmental policies relating to caregiving concerns. For example, several segments end with proposed solutions to the problems addressed in earlier segments. These solutions include changing policies so that caregivers can get assistance (financial and otherwise) for home health care and for caregiver respite; encouraging people to take more responsibility for the financial burdens they may face (working with geriatric care managers, purchasing long-term care insurance, and paying more attention to their physical exercise and nutrition); and changing the culture of nursing homes to make them more humane and effective (William Thomas’s Eden Alternative).

The theme of advocacy throughout the video—especially in the early segments—may be problematic for some viewers. Perceived gaps in our health-care system, the desperation of caregivers stretched to their limits, and the voices of articulate reformers with deeply felt emotions overwhelm viewers with insistent appeals for change. Of course, the crises caregivers face are real; and the consequences of the lack of support they receive is often compelling. Frederick Wiseman, the dean of American documentarists, once noted that documentaries are never objective—they are always subjective, because they contain a myriad of subjective judgments by all of the creative people involved. In this video subjectivity is tilted toward calls for social and political reforms. Marcie Parker’s review (below) covers in detail the way the video moves between numerous profiles of caregivers and their powerful emotional responses to particular crises and the framework of advocacy that utilizes those case studies to promote a specific platform for change.

The video’s distributor, Aquarius Health Care Videos, offers a series of shorter, more focused videos based upon the stories told in & Thou Shalt Honor. I will summarize the contents and potential applications of those videos after the following review.

—Robert E. Yahnke