

REHABFILM FILM REPORT

US AND THEM

USA, 3/4" videocassette, B/W, 32 minutes. Produced by Fred Simon and Jane Kamien and distributed by Fred Simon Productions, 75 Court Street, Newtonville, MA 02160.

Just half of Us and Them is about disabled persons. Its other half is about nondisabled persons. Halves combined, it is about three one-to-one relationships between disabled and nondisabled persons. There's little to say about its form. Camera and editing are fine, no more or less than required. There's lots to say about its content. Us and Them says more about how disabled and nondisabled persons are identical spiritually than any 100 average programs about disability. It shows, simply and profoundly, how love transcends physical and even mental differences absolutely. It's as if no camera and tv screen intervened between audience and subject. Faith, hope, and love flow forcefully, though regrettably only in one direction, from subject to audience.

Ray and Pat are married. Ray has 2% vision, he can distinguish light from shadow. He was blinded in an accident at age 17. Ray met Pat and right away invited her to a party, which ended up consisting only of Ray, his roommate, another young woman similarly tricked, and Pat. She says she hadn't thought a blind man would try anything so devious, but knows better now. Ray and Pat are a comedy team. Ray says he'll probably start talking to a mannequin or dressing mirror by mistake someday while out shopping. Pat enjoys watching Ray salt and pepper the whole table at dinner. She distinguishes between good and bad humor, however. After going out once, Ray told Pat she could tell her mother she'd finally had a really blind date. Pat didn't think it was funny then and still doesn't. "I felt like he was putting himself down too much", Pat says. Instead, she and her husband now practice constructive jokemaking. When his wife tested for her driver's license, Ray tripped around in the parking lot to make sure her tester realized what was at stake. He also says his money is good as anyone else's, so why shouldn't he get mugged too? Pat says ordinary people generally treat disabled people of all types like idiots. Ray is angry he hasn't yet gotten clearance to skydive.

Bob and David are bestfriends and roommates. David became a quadriplegic in an auto accident as a teenager. He's a senior at University of Massachusetts, where he met Bob. At first, Bob tutored David in mathematics. Bob

plus David equalled friendship soon enough. Bob looks and sounds tough, even macho. But we realize right away how open he is to gentle emotions. Bob is awesomely capable of giving and taking love. "I love David", he says matter-of-factly. Bob also matter-of-factly recites the three questions he first had about David. 1. How does he piss? 2. How does he shit? 3. Can he have sex? Bob had an epiphany of sorts while serving in Vietnam. Seeing a peasant woman weeping over her dead husband, he realized all at once everybody was like him, human. Even Vietnamese, insect-eaters tiny as children. Nondisabled people tend to look at disabled people like he once looked at Vietnamese. David accepts help from Bob. Bob likes shaving his friend but hates brushing his teeth! We get the idea, love for another transforms work into joy. Like Ray and Pat, Bob and David joke too. Some, Bob's sister included, disapprove of tee-shirts saying "Crip is Hip". At work, Bob is asked endless questions about David, but doesn't say much to satisfy people's curiosity. Reflecting on it, he says, "I don't know, maybe I should talk more about it. Maybe they want to know how he pisses and shits and if he can have sex too."

David (another David) and Izzy (for Israel) are close friends. Izzy is mentally retarded, but not severely. He speaks slowly, but his vocabulary is large. Izzy and David are both about 35. David says he at first feared his new friend would become too dependent. "Will I become responsible for him?", he worried. Izzy, as it turns out, prizes independence like anybody, and would not have a less-than-equal friendship either. David says he's more confused than ever about what retardation is. Izzy has intellectual limitations by many societal measures, yet has penetrating insights into life and emotion no one else could have. "I'm proud I'm able to cry, Izzy asserts. He never stops being inquisitive about everything, which makes him exciting to be around. Izzy sums up one of his talents like so, "I know an asshole when I see one." David agrees, Izzy can see through fronts into souls. (He's even critical of David, here and there!) Seeking friendship, David has been disappointed by most males. Love doesn't come easy between men, he believes. Izzy is an exception for David.

On his part, Izzy had tended to distrust males since someone made sexual overtures to him years ago in a public restroom. "I love the man!" David has said again and again to his wife when talking about Izzy. Both men are heavily bearded, which is funny visually. It also may cause initial confusion, who is who? Who is us and who is them?