

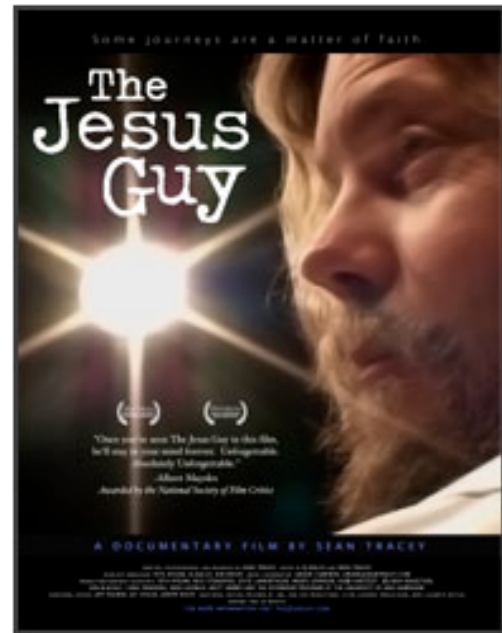


## Review: The Jesus Guy

May 1st, 2008 by ben saylor · No Comments · Reviews

### The Jesus Guy

- ▶ OPENING DATE: 04/20/2008
- ▶ STUDIO: Sean Tracey Associates
- ▶ TRAILER: [Trailer](#)
- ▶ ACCOMPLICES: [Official Site](#)



### The Charge

Some journeys are a matter of faith.

### The Case

Filmmaker Sean Tracey found a doozy of a documentary subject in "What's Your Name?," a longhaired, bearded man who wanders from town to town, preaching the Scripture to anyone who will listen. He tells people that he does not use money and has no possessions, and that he only accepts food and shelter when they are offered to him. Clad in flowing white robes (which, despite a lack of regular access to a washing machine, always seem to look pretty clean) and walking barefoot, What's Your Name? resembles popular images of Jesus, although he never claims to actually be The Man. In **The Jesus Guy**, Tracey follows What's Your Name? (currently going by James Joseph; his full name is Carl James Joseph), over a three-year period as he preaches and interacts with different people.

With **The Jesus Guy**, Tracey manages to craft an admirably objective documentary, one in which his presence as the filmmaker is generally invisible. (This changes

somewhat during What's Your Name?'s confrontation with a small-town police department.) Indeed, the movie poster and trailer contain words of praise from legendary documentary filmmaker Albert Maysles (**Salesman**). And while Tracey's film never gives us the same total immersion into the subject that the Maysles brothers do in their best work, he still manages to create a rounded portrait of What's Your Name? Within the film's 66-minute runtime, Tracey (who directed, produced, photographed, and co-edited the film) provides strong fly-on-the-wall footage of What's Your Name? during his travels as well as interviews both positive and negative about his subject. It's especially interesting to see the contrast between Mary Elizabeth Battles and Connie Muir. Both Battles and Muir provided free room and board to What's Your Name? at different points, and while Battles remains a supporter of What's Your Name?, Muir seems embittered by her experience with him. (At only 66 minutes, Tracey could have afforded to include more material from Battles and Muir; as interesting as What's Your Name? is, it's also intriguing that someone would allow someone who was previously a total stranger to them to live in their home for as long as a year.) What's Your Name?'s motives are also called into question during the documentary due to his awareness of the attention given to him by the media. And indeed, What's Your Name? makes multiple references to his appearances on television programs such as *20/20* throughout the course of the film.

On the other hand, when we see What's Your Name? interacting with people, he is always friendly and considerate, even when he disagrees with someone's point of view. And really, when it comes down to it, why would someone pretend such a level of faith and commitment? Yes, he gets free room and board from people, but if that's all he wanted, I imagine he could live with his dad, who appears in the film. He's certainly not doing all this for material gain, as he doesn't have any possessions beyond the clothes on his back and doesn't accept money. That level of asceticism is, to me, why What's Your Name? is such a compelling figure.

**The Jesus Guy** isn't perfect in the video or sound departments. The image varies depending on where certain scenes were shot and at what time of day they were filmed. Sound quality is a little better, although subtitles sometimes appear in order to make dialogue easier to understand.

### **The Verdict**

All in all, **The Jesus Guy** is a very good example of what a filmmaker can do with an interesting subject and a commitment to objectivity, making the film well worth any viewer's time.