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## Documentary follows wandering evangelist

What would a Jesus look-alike do?

Portsmouth filmmaker Sean Tracey doesn't wear a WWJLAD bracelet, but after years tracking a wandering barefoot Christian evangelist known as the "Jesus Guy," he has a pretty good idea.

The Jesus Guy isn't like that scraggly clapboard-wearing guy who camps outside Fenway Park warning fans they're all going to hell. The star of Tracey's first feature documentary is more like a fusion of the Bee Gees' Barry Gibb, your college philosophy professor, and Abbott and Costello.

Sporting gorgeously groomed locks and a flowing white robe that he keeps pristine by washing it in gas-station sinks, the spiritual vagabond insists he is not trying to pass himself off as the real thing. He's aiming to "live like Jesus lived, to be poor like Jesus."

"This is not a costume, it's not a portrayal," he says. "It's following a lifestyle."

Now making the rounds on the film festival circuit, the documentary follows the Jesus Guy from 2000-03 during his travels through Pennsylvania and New Jersey, including some of the most run-down, dangerous neighborhoods of Philadelphia and Atlantic City.

With all those discarded needles, broken glass and God-knows-what-kinds-of-fluids on the streets, the true miracle here is that Jesus Guy's feet remain unblemished.

"They are in amazing condition," marvels the filmmaker. "No calluses, just like a baby's feet. We walked a lot in 100-degree weather, and I could feel the hot pavement through my hiking boots."

Maybe Tracey, who produces TV commercials full time, could land Jesus Guy an endorsement deal with Dr. Scholl's.

He wouldn't take the money, though. Throughout the documentary, he is shown refusing to accept donations of any kind. He eats and sleeps at the homes of benevolent (and usually religious) strangers, but only if he is offered the hospitality unsolicited.

Tracey, who was inspired to follow his character after reading a Time magazine article, does not portray him as a saint.

In countless scenes, Jesus Guy introduces himself to strangers via a tiresome routine similar to Abbott and Costello's "Who's on First?" The street evangelist publicly won't use his birth name, identifying himself only as "What's your name."

When a stranger asks for his name, he replies with "What's your name?" They inevitably state their name and ask for his again. The process is "painful," Tracey admits, but "it seemed to work well for him."

Jesus Guy appears to enjoy psychologically tormenting his prospective converts with this gag. He also is lacking in basic manners.

Mary Elizabeth Battles, a religious middle-aged woman who provided Jesus Guy with food and shelter for months, nakedly confesses to the camera that her spiritual guru just disappeared one day with no warning. Even more baffling: not a single "thank you."

The spurned host is shown crying as she recounts her private time with Jesus Guy.

"He is the most humble person you or I will ever be blessed to know," she sobs.

Chances are, the real Jesus would have been more polite. But the Bee Gee-like vagabond never claimed to be the real Jesus. Battles had projected her own supernatural expectations on a total stranger.

And the more time she spent with him, the more she realized how little she knew about him.

Moments like these make "The Jesus Guy" a fascinating movie about faith.

While editing his film, Tracey had heard rumors that the Vatican was pleased with Jesus Guy and wanted to grant him a meeting with the Pope. That grand moment never materialized, but the evangelist is still pounding the pavement today in Alabama.

"He really doesn't know what he's going to be doing 10 minutes from now, and he doesn't care about it," says Tracey, who just reunited with his subject at the Sidewalk Moving Picture Festival in Birmingham, Ala. "He truly lives in the moment."

#### ON THE NET

"The Jesus Guy" was featured recently at the New Hampshire Film Festival. For updates when Sean Tracey's film will be screening locally or be available on DVD, visit [www.thejesusguy.com/blog](http://www.thejesusguy.com/blog).

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