

## Troubya

By Joshua Tanzer

offoffoff.com - Tuesday, June 03, 2008

**"Crawford" is a documentary about what happened to a town in Texas when it was hit by Hurricane George.**



"Crawford" is a documentary about the other 700 residents of Crawford, Texas, that you aren't already all-too-intimately familiar with.

The town's most famous citizen is currently away, spending most of his time in the White House (if occasionally returning to clear brush for the cameras). The rest of the good people of Crawford are still trying to figure out what hit 'em.

"People never did know where Crawford was. You'd say, 'Well, it's close to Waco,'" one old-timer says. "Now someone asks you where's Waco at, you tell 'em, 'Oh, it's 15 miles from Crawford.'"

The town, as I was only vaguely aware before seeing the film, was not President Bush's ancestral home. He moved there in 1999. Of course, the town was thrilled to welcome the then-popular governor to their community, and we see him dropping by football games and graduations, to smiles all around.

Still, there's a nagging doubt about whether Bush is genuine Crawford.

"His communications staff chose Crawford to create an image," says a local teacher, "because he was going to run for the presidency and he was going to have to be from something more than the governor's mansion, I think."

The film shows us some of what there is to do around town — ballgames, ranching, pickup driving, and dominoes. This was the fabric of life, until the president, the press and the war turned Crawford into a backdrop for the nightly news. (The locals laugh about how reporters jockey for a spot near the school where they can stand in front of a broken-down shed and a bale of hay.)



So what happens to your neighborhood when the president makes it his official fake hometown? Trouble, that's what.

Especially if he starts a massively unpopular war.

By 2004, tourists had started to give way to protesters. Cindy Sheehan and her followers had camped outside the Bush estate, intruding on his wartime vacation.

Intruding, as well, on the way of life in a formerly tranquil town. Crawford had always had a scattered few anti-war voices, some of whom ran the "Crawford Peace House." But now, the right-wing town's dismissal turns to anger. The

local paper ("The Iconoclast") is a target of rage, youngsters are ostracized. Most agree that Sheehan has dishonored her soldier's son's memory by speaking out — which is, of course, a way of saying they should own his death, not his mother.

A couple of longtimers paint their horses with slogans and saddle up, loving America and sneering at malcontents all the way up main street.

Passions are high. Times, contrary to what you might think, are good.

Because what happens next is a surprise to all. America suddenly has a funny reaction to the town's non-native son — it simply loses all respect for him and stops coming to Crawford. Hurricane George has passed and all is quiet again.

That's a disaster if you've opened a Bush memorabilia shop and it's empty. Oops.

It's merely strange and amusing if you're an average old-timer — the circus came to town, took up residence, and just as suddenly vanished. Crawford starts to look like every other town with dusty roads and closed storefronts.

"Crawford" is a fine documentary that doesn't make the mistake of coming at its subject head-on — it's not a shocking exposé of the feckless president. It's about just what it should be about — the regular folks who watched the whole absurd parade pass through.

There is maybe one subtle fault with the film. By the end, we hear something about how tough it's been for the left-of-center residents to bear up under pressure from their fellow townspeople. And that's a pretty interesting story, but the film all along has given equal coverage to pro-Bush and anti-Bush factions, which makes it hard to appreciate that pressure. It skews the town by trying to be evenhanded. It's the fairness paradox.

Still, "Crawford" gives us a terrific feeling for Bush country. It's full of individuals, not stereotypes, and seems to grow from the soil of the place the president wanted to be from.

©2008 *offoffoff.com*

<http://www.offoffoff.com/film/2008/crawford.php>

<http://www.brooklynfilmfestival.org>