



'Parallel Lines'

By DENNIS HARVEY
New Yorker

Nina Davenport was in the middle of work on someone else's film project in San Diego when 9/11 hit. Afraid to fly, and needing some time to let things sink in before arriving home -- her apartment looked directly onto the World Trade Center -- she decided to drive cross-country, sticking to backroads and interviewing ordinary folk along the way. Resulting "Parallel Lines" is an affecting personal documentary that proves there's still some heart left in the American Heartland. Select telecast sales are signaled. Davenport detours to a few spots of relevance -- a museum in Los Alamos (where she meets an elderly couple who worked on the Manhattan Project), Waco, the Oklahoma City National Memorial, the Pentagon, finally NYC Ground Zero -- but mostly she's drawn toward nondescript locales and chance encounters. Most people are open, sharing their own tales of personal loss and trial, expressing a wider range of political opinion than one might expect amid the post-9/11 mood of public patriotism. Without promulgating an agenda, a portrait emerges of a fallibly human populace including retirees, veterans, lonely singles, and folks struggling financially -- precisely those usually absent from media portrayal. Rugged individuality survives in eccentric personalities like the philosophical female reverend at a Las Vegas wedding chapel, middle-aged hippie types living in the woods near Santa Fe, and a grizzled cancer-scarred cowboy who tells Davenport, "I liked you as soon as you were gonna have a beer with me in the mornin'." The conciliatory mood is capped when one man target-shooting in Ohio says his father abandoned him as a child. Asked why he's so forgiving about that, he says, "Anger destroys the container it's kept in." Pic's only real negative note is sounded by an Alabama father-and-son farmer duo spouting racist doggerel. Landing in Gotham just in time for the New Year's Eve ball-drop in Times Square, and a cautious first approach to the WTC wreckage, Davenport wisely keeps an empathetic, community-oriented focus on other people throughout. She's on-screen a fair amount, as she was in prior first-person docus "Hello Photo" and "Always a Bridesmaid." There are a few too many views of her looking pensive behind the wheel, but for the most part, "Parallel Lines" avoids any whiff of vanity project. Consistently engaging, often poignant pic is well shot by verite standards, and very well edited. Aptly low-key musical score features primarily acoustic guitar. Camera (color, DV), Davenport; music, Sheldon Mirowitz; sound editor, Dave Ellinwood. Reviewed at San Francisco Doc Fest, May 15, 2004. Running time: 98 MIN.

‘Parallel Lines Review’

By Eugene Hernandez

"Parallel Lines" is Nina Davenport's cross-country exploration of the emotional after-shocks Americans felt in the months immediately after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Davenport is a New Yorker whose apartment overlooked the World Trade Center. She was in San Diego on September 11th but instead of catching a plane to New York, she rented a car and drove home, interviewing people along the way. That may not seem like a very unusual topic for an American to pursue, but "Parallel Lines" isn't exactly a 9/11 film. Davenport is more interested in the revelations that happen around the subject of 9/11, not about 9/11 itself. She approached her subjects by asking them what they think about the terrorist attacks, and they almost immediately begin to talk about ancillary subjects, like the cowboy in Bandera, Texas who tries to explain why his mother shot his father all those years ago, or the clearly racist, poor white Alabama farmer talking about his black friends who live nearby. "Parallel Lines" also played at Amsterdam, but it hasn't taken off in America, probably because it's been unfairly tagged as a "9/11 film." It is also funny, unabashedly entertaining, and personal.