

The Making of “NELLIE”

A closer look at the documentary about an inspirational man who helps boys become men



At a small college in the Pacific Northwest, a man struggles to get out of bed every morning. And because he does, the lives of hundreds of young men and women have been changed forever. The true life story of this man, John "Nellie" Nelson, has been captured in an emotionally charged documentary by director Michael L. McNamara that tells of the sacrifices Nellie makes as he serves the young college football players in his charge.

McNamara first heard about Nellie in the fall of 2002 from his friend, film producer Jeff Martin. Martin told him about being at a post-game party for the Pacific Lutheran University football team. During the party a large group of players went out to a pickup that had just arrived and they returned carrying a wheelchair and its owner, John Nelson.

Martin watched as the players hovered around their friend and cared for him. The man, who, he later learned, was also a coach of the team, could not move any of his limbs—he had to be





Nellie and Michael L. McNamara smile for the camera. McNamara is the director of the inspirational movie *Nellie*. Nellie is an assistant football coach at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington.

completely cared for by the players. Martin was blown away as he watched the lighthearted, yet tender, attention these big jocks were paying this small, fragile man.

"Jeff called me the next day and relayed his experience," says McNamara. "Before he'd even finished I knew that there was a great story here." Two weeks later Martin and McNamara raced up the freeway to Tacoma just in time to shoot the last football game of the season. They also shot several interviews with the players and other coaches.

"What I came back with after those first two days really floored me," says McNamara. "This was more than just a story about a disabled football coach. This was a story of sacrifice, commitment, acceptance and a community of love that had grown up around Nellie and his efforts to serve these young men. It was not only a story about John Nelson, but also about how the lives of hundreds of young men and women had been quietly changed for over 15 years in this little backwater of the Pacific Northwest."

McNamara hopes those who view this 28-minute documentary about Nellie will enjoy it as much as he enjoyed making it. "At least once in a lifetime, a filmmaker hopes to do a project about which he can say, 'This has been worth it all. If I died tomorrow, this will have been enough.'"

UPDATE: *Nellie* was just recently awarded two more awards **INTERNATIONAL FAMILY FILM FESTIVAL AWARD "Best Short Documentary"** and the **NY INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT FILM & VIDEO FESTIVAL "Grand Jury Award - Best Documentary."**

What people are saying about the movie.

"I showed the video version last Thursday to about 35 guys. there were many red eyes, a few tear streaked faces and at least 6 guys who wanted a DVD copy to play for their groups/teams/families etc. "

"I think we're on our 7th viewing now and it continues to challenge us. "

"We offer many classes at our school that teaches students about, Servant Leadership, Character Development, etc. etc., but this documentary of Nellie teaches as much and more than I could teach in many of my classes. Thanks again for the great job"

"There is no question that this movie is changing lives, and will continue to do so for many years to come."

*An award-winning movie of Nellie's life and influence at PLU is available from Bigger Faster Stronger for \$29 please call for details.
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