

Nebraska – film review

David's elderly father Woody is 'confused'. Convinced by a magazine marketing scam that he has won a million dollars, he keeps trying to walk hundreds of miles to Nebraska to claim his prize. Eventually David agrees to drive him, and so begins their road trip into the American Midwest.

Both have been a disappointment to each other – David is kind-hearted but drifting, and Woody is a long-time alcoholic of few words. A drunken episode leads them to stay a few days in Woody's Nebraska home town. Life is slow there and nothing much happens. But as they revisit the places and relationships of Woody's past, David gains a deeper understanding of his father.

Their fiery wife and mother arrives for a family gathering and provides many wry comic moments, although her outrageous comments sometimes stretch the limits of believability. Woody's grasping relatives and old business partner threaten to take advantage of his new-found 'fortune'. By the end of the film however David is able to express his love for his father and finds a way to give him some dignity back.

After *Sideways*, director Alexander Payne didn't immediately want to make another road movie. Thankfully, comedy writer Bob Nelson's script was too good to ignore. The film delivers masterful performances from Oscar-nominated Bruce Dern (Woody), Will Forte (David) and the supporting cast.

Nebraska is shot in black and white, with a simple country waltz as the only soundtrack. The studio apparently took some convincing, but it was the right choice. Beautiful stills of big skies and empty roads gain in austere timelessness. Performances increase in depth and intensity. The film's humanity, etched into faces in the poignant final scene, will stay with you long after watching.

© 2017, *Rosalind Lester*